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Jean Bethke Elshtain:
Feminism and Politics
Trenton State College

MAY 7 1990

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Partisan Review|2

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The Culture of Soviet Anti-Semitism

Louis Menand

A Wilde for Our Time

Amitai Etzioni

Liberals and Communitarians

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of the Holocaust

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The West Covers the East

An Interview with

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PARTISAN REVIEW, published quarterly in Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall by Partisan Review, Inc., is at Boston University, 236 Bay State Rd., Boston, MA 02215. (617) 353-4260. Subscriptions \$18.00 a year, \$33.00 for two years, \$47.00 for three years; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, \$21.00 a year, \$36.00 for two years; institutions, \$28.00 for one year. All payments from foreign countries must be made U.S. money order or checks payable in U.S. currency. Prepaid single issue \$5.00, anniversary issue \$8.00. Add \$1.00 per issue for postage and handling. US ISSN 0031-2525.

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Distributed in the U.S.A. by DeBoer, Nutley, NJ 07710, Capitol News, Boston 02120. Ingram Periodicals, Nashville 37217. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

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Correction: We regret that we included Stanislaw Baranczak's review of *To Urania: Selected Poems* by Joseph Brodsky (PR 1, 1990) under the general heading of "Four Polish Poets." Our apologies.

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COMMENT

The Politics of the Absurd. The theater of the absurd had a rationale: it represented the presumable absurdity of life. But the rationale of the politics of the absurd, as practiced by *The Nation*, is not immediately evident. In its April 29th, 1989 issue, *The Nation* responded to the charges that the events in Eastern Europe undercut its holding on to an outdated leftism and that it had ignored the meaning of the exhilarating democratic revolution and the renunciation of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The editorial in *The Nation* stated that there is no left in America, only a “loose progressive community . . . of left-liberal, democratic socialist, non-aligned post-Marxist, etc., elements that are just as diverse in their circumstances and stages of social formation as are their counterparts in Eastern Europe.” This is surely an evasive answer, for the elements listed by *The Nation* are precisely those that make up the left.

In addition, E. P. Thompson, the leftist British historian, and Noam Chomsky, the leftist American social critic, were recruited to analyze the meaning of the events in the East. Thompson claimed that the peace movement brought about the democratic revolution in Russia and its former satellites, and argued further that the cold warriors of the West retarded the democratization of the communist countries, and that these countries were moving toward “Thatcher’s capitalism.” How can one even begin to refute these absurd propositions? Chomsky concentrated on exposing American democracy, and insisted that what really was needed was a *perestroika* for America. How is this view to be distinguished from the left position that *The Nation* says doesn’t exist?

So absurd is this response to the world-shaking revolts against communism – and socialism – that *The Nation* and its star contributors sound like closet conservatives. For these views serve only as an argument for conservatism. If *The Nation* is to be taken seriously as a left-wing publication, it will have to confront the meaning of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in a more serious manner.

* * *

Realism and Journalism. The November 1989 issue of *Harper’s Magazine* contains a rather flamboyant piece by Tom Wolfe, which he calls “a literary manifesto for the new social novel.” The gist of his argument, which is surrounded by a good deal of inflated literary talk, is that American novelists have missed the boat – the boat being the novel that tells the real story of New York’s complex and sprawling life – which, to be sure, his own novel, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, succeeded in doing. Wolfe also says such a large-canvas social novel can be written only by the use of realism as a fictional method, although realism has been in disrepute in highbrow

modernist literary circles.

It must be said that Wolfe is half-right. Most contemporary fiction has not tackled the kind of subject Wolfe has in mind; in fact, much of it has dealt with narrower, more personal subjects. There have been large canvases, notably *The Naked and the Dead* by Norman Mailer and *Humboldt's Gift* by Saul Bellow, and, of course, Doctorow's ideologically slanted novels. But that is not the point. The fact is that the vast panorama of social, intellectual, and political life, mingling with the financial aristocracy of this country, has not been a concern of most contemporary writers of fiction.

Wolfe's manifesto has one flaw: the failure lies not with the recoil from realism. Much recent fiction does aspire to a kind of petty realism in its representation of the trivia of daily life. What is lacking is not realism but a sense of the range of social experience – a feel for the big theme. Wolfe seems to have some scorn for modernism in literature, but he forgets that such modernists as Mann and Proust produced great social landscapes, though they were not ground-level realists, like Sinclair Lewis, for example, whom Wolfe mentions frequently as a role model for the novelist today. One could also cite a writer like Andrei Sinyavsky, who in his recent novel, *Goodnight*, creates a real sense of the pervasively claustrophobic life in a totalitarian country, by employing a literary method far from the standard idea of realism.

Wolfe makes the further point that the new blockbuster of a social novel can come only out of the genre of journalism, as did *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. But he invokes the name of Balzac as the great exemplar of the realistic social novelist. However, Balzac was far from being a journalist, and, indeed, journalism has been known to lower rather than raise the imaginative level of fiction.

* * *

Eliot Today. So great is my affection for Cynthia Ozick and my admiration for her intelligence, her courage, her moral stands, and her writing – so great is my respect for her that I would not want my comments on her brilliant piece on T. S. Eliot in *The New Yorker* to be taken as a criticism of it. It is a masterful montage of all the elements in Eliot's life and work. And it is a penetrating description of the cultural scene today that is so inhospitable to the kind of literary achievement that Eliot represents. But though Ozick's description of the currently fashionable climate of opinion is scathing, I wish her piece were more of an assault on its pervasive influence. Or have I misread her?

Ozick does raise some rather prickly questions about the relation of Eliot's life to his work, about the enduring value of his poetry and his criticism, and about the relation of his political beliefs to the quality of his work. Ozick's central point is that Eliot's "elitism," pessimism, conservatism, and religiosity have no meaning for the democratic ambience and free-wheeling

sensibility of our cultural attitudes today. Ozick says that deconstruction, feminism, and egalitarianism, among other new movements, have swept away the premises of Eliot's poetry and criticism, and that his reactionary politics and his anti-Semitism are particularly unwelcome today. It is Ginsberg's *Howl*, Ozick says, not Eliot's *Wasteland*, that speaks to us today.

Of course she is mostly right. But this seems to be true of the more popular strains in our culture. It is true of a large part, but not all, of the academy. Yet it does not include many of our leading poets and non-academic critics, who still think of Eliot not necessarily as a contemporary guru but as an important figure in the tradition of criticism and poetry. In my opinion, Eliot was not only a great poet but also one of the great English critics, in the tradition of Dryden, Johnson, Arnold, and Coleridge. And most of our serious poets and critics implicitly acknowledge their debt to his influence, though they may be moving in other directions.

Ozick's summarizing of Eliot's political and cultural conservatism, and his genteel though ugly anti-Semitism, is adroit, as is her account of his shabby treatment of his first wife and the other two women who expected to marry him, though clearly Eliot was himself psychologically crippled and anguished by his disabilities. But the more important question is whether his unwholesome beliefs and behavior can be said to reduce the quality of his poetry and criticism. Where they enter directly into the fiber of his work, as do Pound's beliefs, a case could be made that they do affect its quality. But if they are to be seen as affecting all of Eliot's work, then we have to reexamine the entire literature of the West. Many of the writers whose work we value – for example, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Dickens, Voltaire – had the most unacceptable and often repellent beliefs. Indeed, this question of belief was argued quite well by Eliot himself in his essay on Dante, and more theoretically by both Coleridge and I. A. Richards, in their discussions of the suspension of belief and disbelief in the reading of otherwise commanding works. Both of them maintained that a writer's work transcends his beliefs. If we were to raise the question of belief with regard to Ozick's own work (I happen to agree with her stand on Israel and on other moral and political issues), how would one who does not share her opinions read her?

A minor point: I think Ozick misconstrues Eliot's idea of the objective correlative. It is not, as she seems to indicate, a way of evading or concealing one's experience; it is rather meant as the literary equivalent, particularly in poetry, of that experience. Eliot's assumption is that experience is not literally transplanted to a piece of writing. The concept of the objective correlative could be questioned as a literary principle, but I do not think it is simply what Eliot meant when he spoke about the escape from personality.

What it all comes to, it seems to me, is that if we exclude from the great tradition writers who have held beliefs we do not share, then we must abandon entirely the idea of a tradition. I have written elsewhere that the

Anglo-Saxon tradition is not the tradition that I feel in my own bones. On the other hand, it is a tradition that has formed our minds and provided the precedents for new talents. I am not sure a Western writer could write or think at all in the act of rejecting the Western tradition. Since many of their ideas come from Heidegger, even Derrida and the deconstructionist epigones, in their antitraditional stances, do not ignore the intellectual tradition: they play naughty games within it. The breaks with tradition always occur within the terms of the tradition.

Perhaps a formal criticism of Ozick's piece could be made: so vivid is her characterization of the mood of the present, that it sometimes overshadows her disenchantment with it. But from many of the things Ozick says in her piece, I would assume that she agrees with the defense of literary tradition and the emphasis on the distinction between a writer's life and work. Perhaps the question of belief is too complicated to be resolved summarily.

W. P.

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Jean Bethke Elshtain

FEMINISM AND POLITICS

Understood historically, feminism is a concern with the social role and identity of women in relation to men in societies past and present, animated by a conviction that women suffer and have suffered injustices because of their sex. The political language and aims of modern feminism emerged from the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. Associated historically with forces combatting orthodoxy and autocracy, feminism defined itself as a struggle for recognition of the rights of women, for equality between the sexes, and for redefinitions of womanhood. Drawing upon liberal and rationalist as well as utopian and romantic ideas in Western Europe and America, feminism has long resisted easy definition, and its implications for moral life are ongoingly contested and contestable.

Moral feminism is most often traced to the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792. Wollstonecraft adumbrated what were to become inescapable feminist preoccupations including, but not limited to, the defense of political and natural rights. She challenged received notions of the distinctive virtues of the two sexes; argued for a transformed education for male and female; attacked martial images of citizenship; and celebrated an androgynous notion of the rational self.

Reason became a weapon for women's emancipation, deployed against the exclusive identification of women with 'nature' and their sexual function and capacity. Faith in reason was then coupled with a strong belief in progress. These convictions, refined in and through an already deeply rooted tradition of liberal contractarianism and commitment to formal legalistic equality, are most manifest in John Stuart Mill's classic nineteenth-century tract, *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Counterposing 'Reason' and 'Instinct', Mill looks forward to a society based on rational principles. Reason, he contends, requires nullifying differences of treatment based on considerations of sex, among other 'accidents of birth'. Granting women equality of citizenship and civil liberty in the public realm will help to bring about a deeper transformation in the social relations of the sexes.

Liberalism has been attractive to feminist thinkers. The language of rights is a potent weapon against traditional obligations, particularly those of family duty or any social status declared 'natural' on the basis of ascriptive characteristics. To be 'free' and 'equal' to men became a central aim of feminist reform. The political strategy that follows from this dominant feminism is one of inclusion: women, as well as men, are rational beings. It follows that women as well as men are bearers of inalienable rights. Leading proponents of women's suffrage in Britain and the United States undermined arguments which justified formal legalistic inequality on the basis of sex differences. Such feminists claimed that denying a group of persons basic rights on the grounds

of some presumed difference could not be justified unless it could be shown that the difference was relevant to the distinction being made. Whatever differences might exist between the sexes, none, based on this view, justified legal inequality and denial of the rights and privileges of citizenship.

Few early feminists pushed liberal universalism to its most radical conclusion by arguing that there were *no* justifiable bases for exclusion of adult human beings from legal equality and citizenship. Proponents of women's suffrage were also heirs to a tradition that stressed the need for social order and shared values, emphasized civic education, and pressed the importance of having a propertied stake in society. Demands for the inclusion of women did not often extend to *all* women. Some women, and men, would be excluded by criteria of literacy, property-ownership, disability, or, in the United States, race.

At times, feminist discourse turned liberal egalitarianism on its head by arguing *for* women's civic equality on grounds that served historically to guarantee women's exclusion from politics. One finds the case for greater female political participation argued in terms of women's moral supremacy or characteristic forms of virtue. These appeals, strategic though they have been, were never *merely* strategic. They spoke to and from women's social identity. At various times, radical, liberal, democratic and socialist feminists have paid homage to women as exemplars of particular forms of social virtue.

From the vantage point of rights-based feminism, the emphasis on civic-based motherhood was a trap. But the historic discourse that evoked images of maternal virtue was one feminist response to a complex, rapidly changing political culture. That political culture, in the Western democracies, was committed to liberalism but included as well civic republican themes of social solidarity and national identity. Women made their case within a male-dominated political order from *their* own sphere, a world of female-structured sensibility and imperatives that signified doubly their exclusion from political life and their cultural strength and importance. Less able than men to embrace the identity of a wholly autonomous social atom, often rejecting explicitly the individualist ideal, many feminists endorsed expanded familial values, stripped of patriarchal privilege, as the basis for a new social world.

Feminists also turned variously to socialism, in its utopian and 'scientific' aspects, and to romanticism. Finding in notions of class oppression an analogue to women's social position vis-à-vis men, socialist feminists promoted notions of sex-class struggle and revolt. Feminists indebted to romanticism embraced a robust notion of a passionate, feeling self breaking the encrustations of social custom. Pressing a notion that women suffered as much from *repression*, or internalized notions of their own incapacities, as from *oppression*, or systematically imposed rules and customs that guaranteed sex inequality, feminist romantics stressed women's 'especial genius' (in the worlds of the American

transcendentalist, Margaret Fuller) and hoped to see a social transformation that would free women's 'difference' and allow it to flourish, even to dominate.

The diverse history of feminisms in the plural forms the basis of current feminist discourse and debate. These debates secrete ethical imperatives and trail in their wake moral implications whether or not the thinkers involved articulate fully such imperatives or implications. Varieties of liberal, socialist, Marxist, and utopian feminism abound. Sexuality and sexual identity have become highly charged arenas of political redefinition. Some feminists see women as universal victims; others as a transhistorical sex-class; others as oppressed 'nature'. A minority urge women to separate entirely from male-dominated society. Some want full integration into that society, hence its transformation towards liberal equality. Others insist that the feminist project will not be complete until 'women's values', correctly understood, triumph. There are feminists who embrace a strong notion of women's difference, ontologically grounded, and others who reject any such idea as itself sexist. It's hard to wend one's way through the thicket of contemporary feminist discourse without some sort of map. But even with various categorical markers at hand, it is tricky at times to figure out what game is being played.

Is feminist scholarship primarily or exclusively the ideological arm of 'the feminist movement'? There are feminist analysts who make this argument and insist that unless a text helps feminist doctrine, as they understand it, to triumph, it does not deserve the name 'feminism' and must, instead, be condemned as suspect if not downright heretical. There are other feminists who make a distinction between feminism as politics and feminism as the inspiration and occasion for scholarly endeavor. Anthropologist Judith Shapiro, for example, insists that the time has come for scholars to loosen the tie between their endeavors and the political rhetoric and ideological claims of feminism. "The danger," she wrote in an essay, "Anthropology and the Study of Gender," "in too close an association between scholarship and social reformism is not only in the limits it places on intellectual inquiry, but also in the implication that our lives as social, moral, and political beings are dependent on what we are able to discover in our scientific research. Loosening the tie would have liberating consequences . . . for anthropological investigation and for feminism as a social movement." But the hard-liners counter that a feminist text must exemplify and elaborate a "shared commitment to certain political aims and objectives" (in Rosalind Cloward's words) and that books are properly read and measured against a clear set of ideological criteria.

A will to power and truth as anathematizing the heretical and embracing the politically correct is painfully evident in a number of the texts under review. The *primary* aim of several of these works is to round up and to isolate the usual suspects and to form the friends into one of Milan Kundera's circle dances. Thus Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, in *Nostalgia and Sex-*

ual Difference, attribute a terrible anxiety to those they deem foes, a deep fear of the feminist project as they understand it. The suspect roster includes Thomas Berger, George Stade, Dan Greenburg, Ishmael Reed, John Irving, Christopher Lasch, and Brigitte and Peter Berger. Several “political reactionary” feminists are also indicted as co-conspirators, including Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, and Jean Elshtain, because they have “expressed concern about feminism’s effect on founding structures, life forces, and of course, the family as the home of natural truths about men and women.” The circle dance is enfolded by repeated use of the encomium “fine,” to endorse articles and arguments the authors embrace. The text is peppered with “in a fine article” or “in her fine article,” a locution that makes its way even into the footnotes in a fervor of approval.

What is odd about the authors’ rogues’ gallery is how little its members share with one another. Lasch and the Berbers, for example, are at odds in their assessment of the baneful or beneficial effects of capitalism. Because their views about feminism are integrally related to their general analyses of liberal capitalist society, they vary dramatically. Never mind; in drawing up a hit list, fine distinctions simply get in the way. Appeals from a national abortion rights organization go out under John Irving’s name and with a letter ‘signed’ by him. This would seem to make him p. c. (politically correct), but evidently his “anxiety” about female sexuality disqualifies him. Reed, on the other hand, can scarcely be called anxious. He is just plain angered by what he considers unfair assaults on black men by black feminist writers that serve, in his view, to deepen racist fears of the black man among whites.

Similarly, the trio Friedan, Greer, Elshtain is very odd, as each of our understandings of feminism and its politics differs in important, not trivial ways. None, to my knowledge, have ever fretted about “life forces.” Indeed, I have no idea what Doane and Hodges are talking about, and I doubt Friedan and Greer do either. And in light of the fact that each of us, in her own way, has denied explicitly that the family is a home for *natural* truths *simpliciter*, it becomes clear that Doane and Hodges are practicing the dogmatizing, not the expansive and exploratory, sort of feminist scholarship. One telltale sign is this: at least one of the three “reactionary feminists” condemned was not even read by the authors, or at least there is no evidence of this; rather, a debunking essay by a socialist feminist entitled, “The New Conservative Feminism,” which indicts the same crew, is used as the sole source for Doane’s and Hodges’s matter-of-fact, unexplored repudiations. This is not the way scholarship works, but it is the way ideology functions and reproduces itself.

In a like way, Catharine A. MacKinnon, best known for her efforts (together with Andrea Dworkin) to ban pornography as a form of discrimination on the basis of sex (hence a violation of the civil rights of women lodged in the conviction that civil liberties, most of the time, are

“bourgeois hypocrisy,” to be overridden when, in Dworkin’s words, “We’re talking about the oppression of a class of people”), does not shy away in the least from condemnations of political opponents as enemies. In *Feminism Unmodified. Discourses on Life and Law*, MacKinnon sees the First Amendment as the self-interested expression of “white men from the point of view of their own social position. Some of them owned slaves; most of them owned women.” The First Amendment was written to guarantee their freedom to perpetuate such ownership. Dubious as legal scholarship, this is impossible as political history. It cannot explain why there should have been any debate about the passage of the First Amendment at all, unless MacKinnon further assumes that some of the writers and amenders of the Constitution didn’t know their own true interests and hence failed to push unambiguously for a measure that was to their “sex-class” advantage.

MacKinnon’s approach to feminist discourse is relentlessly exclusionary. There is “the feminist theory of power” and “the feminist theory of knowledge” – no room for debate; one need only separate the correct from the incorrect. Her work aims at closure, not conversation, and its political implications are deeply troubling. By spreading oppression, victimization and patriarchal horror around so universally and uniformly, women emerge as “object victims,” not historic agents. Finally, MacKinnon’s totalizing rhetoric blurs the distinction between being raped at gunpoint in a dark alley and confronting, for example, ambiguous evidentiary rules or habitual patterns of academic departmental behavior that have unintentional sexist outcomes. All women are raped: the women in the alley, the corporate female manager, the homemaker, the superstar. “Women are raped by guns, age, white supremacy, the state – only derivatively by the penis,” she writes in an earlier text, and that view is further elaborated in *Feminism Unmodified*. When she isn’t separating the sheep from the goats, MacKinnon’s prose is turgid, sinking under the weight of its own ponderousness. Thus: “Objectivity is the epistemological stance of which objectification is the social process, of which male dominance is the politics, the acted-out social practice. That is, to look at the world objectively is to objectify it.” You figure it out. On one point, MacKinnon and I do agree: ideas matter, and that is why hers are so troubling.

Another writer is Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, whose latest work is *Deceptive Distinctions*. As in her earlier work, *Woman’s Place*, published in 1971, Epstein laments the fact that women were a resource not being properly exploited to the wider benefit of society as a whole. Epstein believes in ‘reality’ and criticizes claims that differences between males and females other than utterly trivial ones exist or, if they do exist, that they matter. For Epstein the body, that extraordinary container for identity and being, is seen as “raw physiology.”

Her treatment of embodiment positions Epstein squarely on the so-

called 'equality' side of the current "difference versus equality" debate, as it has been unfortunately cast. Epstein, however, does not consider the class dimension to this debate historically. Middle-class women have been more likely to push formal-legalistic equality and to challenge exclusion from public life, by which they mean the positions of official power wielded by men. Working-class women, on the other hand, have been less concerned with abstract rights than with concrete socio-economic matters, many of them lodged in recognition of biological difference, primarily the fact that it is women who get pregnant and give birth. Using the findings of science (which is, however, divided on this score, with recent scholarship, much of it carried out by women, emphasizing differences), Epstein insists that in an ideal world gender distinctions would be a matter of complete indifference. Epstein makes judgements about the works of a whole crew of feminist analysts based, not upon their own work, but upon polemical secondary sources. Here are a few examples. I get yet another walk-on role, this time as a "self-identified feminist," in fact a "conservative" who "regards the family in universal terms." As proof, from my book, *Public Man, Private Woman*, she cites a few words as quoted by the author of "The New Conservative Feminism," the same source Doane and Hodges accept as Holy Writ. In fact, my treatment of the family in *Public Man, Private Woman* is framed with these words: "I recognize that there is no such thing as 'the family' but that there are multiple variations on this theme." Similarly, three feminist writers on motherhood – Alice Rossi, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and "June Flax," (whose name Epstein has wrong as it is 'Jane', not 'June') – are excoriated based upon the blasts of others rather than upon a direct engagement with their work. Alice Rossi's "biosocial perspective" is debunked, but none of Rossi's own work appears in the bibliography. Such lapses are disappointing coming, as they do, from a serious sociologist.

Moving from Epstein's report to Claire Duchén's very helpful collection, *French Connections*, a slice of life from the recent past that introduces the French MLF (*mouvement de libération des femmes*) through "certain key debates," is a dizzying experience. Duchén's selections detail the contentiousness, the internecine ideological warfare, and the remarkable fact that what emerged as the most "telling questions" included: "Can you be feminist and heterosexual? Can men be political allies or are all men always the enemy?" Clearly there is real sectarian battiness at work if those are *the* questions. There are a number of dissenting voices. François Picq, for example, characterizes what the MLF became as a "Parisian, intellectual, narcissistic group." Annie Leclerc also distances herself from the most egregious examples of rhetorical overkill, but she goes on to issue a remarkable utopian plaint: "We have to invent everything anew." This is a recipe for both arrogance and defeat.

More troubling by far, however, are those radical separatists who label

heterosexual women “collabos,” drawing upon the language of complicity with German occupiers in World War II. Lesbians who believe they can work with the “collabos” are smeared as “kapos,” prisoners in Nazi concentration camps who helped the guards. Thus: “A ‘Feminist’ who loves her oppressor is a collaborator.” Or: “Hetero-‘Feminist’-kapos for patriarchy.” This is repugnant. Not only does it “turn feminism against the vast majority of women,” as one of Duchén’s interlocutors notes, it banalizes the Shoah, cheapening and trivializing its horrors and the mass slaughter of World War II in general by comparing it to ordinary, everyday heterosexual relations. This is not political thinking, as Hannah Arendt has so brilliantly argued: it is violence; it is a terroristic alternative to civic discourse. To respond to it by pointing out that, after all, we are talking about just a few extremists will not suffice. Those prepared to ravage the world in order to change it must be exposed and criticized, no matter what stalking horse they are riding or how few or many their numbers.

The contrast between the narrowly ideologizing and the more expansive instances of feminist and women’s studies scholarship grows more and more apparent with each passing day. Even works under review here that are neither particularly expansive nor gripping, for example, Demaris Wehr’s *Jung and Feminism* and Donald Meyer’s *Sex and Power*, which is less than the sum of its 721 pages, offer *something* to the reader beyond categorical rigidities or rhetorical overkill. Wehr’s effort is marred by overgeneralizations about androcentrism, sexism, and misogyny – they are not one and the same – and underlaboring in her attempt to convince the reader that Jung’s psychology of types, with its essentializing categories, has something to offer modern feminism. I doubt it, and merely intoning the virtues of “holism” doesn’t do the trick. Jung’s Manicheanism, which identifies “the feminine principle” with matter and the “masculine principle” with spirit, has in the past and will in the future work great mischief; moreover, Wehr’s definition of “internalized oppression” as something that “feels a certain way inside a woman, it speaks with a certain voice, and it has a certain effect on her” evaporates as soon as one focuses on it for more than a fleeting moment.

Meyer’s troubles, on the other hand, are reminiscent of the story Abraham Lincoln once told a group of interlocutors who were pushing a particular author upon him, and he replied that no one had ever delved deeper into the well of knowledge or come up drier. Meyer tells four stories of the rise of women in the United States, Russia, Sweden, and Italy from the mid-nineteenth century to 1987. He makes the solid and welcome point that women are not to be construed as history’s victims but as active persons confronting concrete dilemmas in particular times and places, and he notes that many formidable early historians of women, Mary Beard among them, mocked “relapses into the pathos of victimology, when their own data

showed strong effective women.” He assumes a 5,000-year-old conflict between men and women that takes particular forms in diverse societies. But his work is too atheoretical, missing an animating vision, and by its conclusion one is caught muttering, as political scientist Jane Jaquette has pointed out, “A woman’s work is never done.”

By contrast, the texts by Thurston, Banta, Scott, and Loraux, and those edited by Haus and Higgonet and associates, offer solid food for thought, many pleasures to the reader, a plethora of challenges to received wisdom, and as they do so display feminist scholarship at its most engaged yet thoughtful best. Their subjects range from the popular romance novel to classic Greek tragedy; from the construction of bodily imagery to war as a “gendering activity”; from Foucaultian insights to culture-constituting imagery. Feminism serves, for these scholars, as inspiration, as challenge, as focus, as organizing theme. The political commitments of the writers involved, insofar as these are made explicit, range from Marxist to vaguely liberal. I note this to allay any suspicion that one particular brand of feminism is more susceptible than some other to the dogmatics of the circle dance. This is not necessarily so. Liberals as well as radicals and socialists of many stripes can and have formed the circle and narrowed the boundaries of discourse by eliminating, or seeking to eliminate, undesirable elements.

To happy specifics, then. Thurston writes in a generous, populist spirit. She notes the extraordinary number of adult women reading romances (more than twenty million by her estimate), not so that she can then throw up her hands in horror and condemn their mindlessness but in order to take seriously the literary genre that engages them. And what she finds is fascinating. The new paperback romance novel came to full bloom during the same years that saw the rise of feminist politics and writing. While those who have bought into the notion that the “masses” are “overwhelmingly passive, manipulated, and dominated from above” see in the romances a reaction to feminism, Thurston finds feminist themes running through many of the texts. The heroine is an individual in her own right. She “possesses a passionate drive for self-determination and autonomy.” The romance narrative is one of “reciprocal sexual satisfaction.” Male heroes shed tears. In three-fourths of the texts in which a rape occurs, the point that it was not the woman’s fault is made explicitly by the male hero. And so on.

Rather than being the “opiate of the female masses,” these tales that reach millions are reflective of an upsurge in female assertiveness, especially of the erotic sort. The romances, Thurston claims, “constitute the first large and autonomous body of sexual writing by women addressed to feminine experiences,” and she worries that feminist antipornographers would drum this literature out of business if they succeed in their efforts. This may, in fact, be an explicit intent of one segment of the antipornography ranks, since the sexuality elaborated in the romances is normatively heterosexual – or so

Thurston hints. She writes, "To suggest that heterosexual bonding is in itself inherently conservative and inimical to women, as some feminists have done, is to both deny human needs and turn a blind eye to where grassroots social change has and is taking place."

Similarly, and from a very different vantage point, the German Marxist-feminist project outlined in *Female Sexualization* speaks to the politics of everyday human life as reconstructed from personal memories of the socialization and "sexualization" of the female body: "Frauenformen," the writers call it. Borrowing heavily if critically from the work of Foucault, Haus and the other members of her "collective" aim to "denaturalize the body," to extricate the social and historical body from various "naturalistic and ahistorical conceptions." They are tuned in to a politics of identity that is bodily-based. Countering Epstein's "raw physiology" reductionism, the participants in this project understand that the body is a site in and through which complex formations of identity occur and that human beings do not conform to social norms concerning the body in ways that are uncomplicated. Although I grew a bit weary of the lengthy, detailed reconstructions of memories concerning body hair, legs, postures, tummies, and all the rest, I was impressed by the thoughtfulness brought to bear and the theoretical acumen that facilitated this reflective effort.

The most interesting feature of the book is its coming to grips with the thinking of Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), specifically his lectures on the "theology of the body" written before he became Pope. These socialist feminists describe Wojtyła's procedure as "remarkably modern . . . quite sophisticated." As they sum it up, Wojtyła privileges the dignity of the human person who is never to be treated as a means to another's end, whether in work or love. He rejects utilitarianism and egoism. He refutes the notion that human beings are slaves to the sexual drive and repudiates the view that this drive is evil. "Wojtyła does not consider desire to be morally wrong in itself; what would be wrong would be the subordination of the will to desire." Because, on Wojtyła's view, humans are social and sexual beings, the sex drive must be integrated into morality – into personhood, self-determination, free will, an inner life, and responsibility to others. This is a sexual ethic based, in Wojtyła's words, on pleasure "without treating the person as an object of pleasure," whose ultimate goal is "integrated love, which incorporates all human impulses" and involves "full and deep appreciation of the beauty of the [other] person."

The authors note that Wojtyła, with feminists, conceives of the domain of love and sexuality as a discursive and political battlefield over which each seeks to impose a ethical order. They give Wojtyła credit for having "learned from Marxism," but finally his position must be struggled against, they conclude, because it is too normatively restrictive in opposing abortion and embracing heterosexual or potentially generative intimate relationships. What is

remarkable about all this is just how difficult such a discussion would be within academic feminist circles in the United States because the tradition of social thought shared by this group of German feminists and, in large part, by Wojtyła, is not dominated by the categories and assumptions of liberal discourse.

Anyone interested in culture, politics, history, and literature will profit from reading the remaining four books under review. First, the collection edited by Higgonet, Jenson, Michel, and Weitz, *Behind the Lines. Gender and the Two World Wars*, is a vital entry in the new feminist scholarship on war and war-making, on the construction of motherhood as a feature of national security, for example, and whether and, if so, how nations traffic in gendered representations in their war/peace politics. The multiple authors of this text refuse to traffic in banalities and overwrought analogies. They teach us much that we might not even want to know. For example, Sandra Gilbert's path-breaking essay, "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War," supplies us with startling examples of the upbeat prowar literature of many women writers and feminist activists in the World War One period. My favorite is Rose Macaulay who, in her poem, "Many Sisters to Many Brothers," expressed envy of the soldier's liberation from the dreariness of the home front in these words: "Oh it's you that have the luck, out there in blood and muck." Concludes Gilbert: "In the words of women propagandists as well as in the deeds of feather-carrying girls, the classical Roman's noble *patria* seemed to have become a sinister, death-dealing *matria*."

Second, Joan Scott's essays in *Gender and the Politics of History* compel us to recognize that any "unitary concept," including, of course, male, female, power, oppression, equality, "rests on – contains – repressed or negated material and so is unstable, not unified." She offers, among her many insights, a sophisticated discussion of the "difference" question. Scott rejects the idea, following Martha Minow, that equality versus difference constitutes an opposition. "Instead of framing analyses and strategies as if such binary pairs were timeless and true, we need to ask how the dichotomous pairing of equality and difference itself works. Instead of remaining within the terms of existing political discourse, we need to subject those terms to critical examination." Within their very different frameworks and projects, and without heavy theoretical thematizing of the issues at stake, Loraux's *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* and Banta's *Imaging American Women* carry out Scott's call to subject existing terms to critical examination.

Third, Loraux's ninety pages are a marvel of condensation. Homing in on one question – how women in the tragedies are done to death – she shows us that Greek tragedy "as a civic institution, delighted in blurring the formal frontier between masculine and feminine and freed women's deaths from the banalities to which they were restricted by private mourning." The suicide of wives and the sacrifices of virgins are, of course, most important. Suicide is the "woman's solution." A man "worthy of the name could die only

by the sword or the spear of another, on the field of battle.” Importantly, “the woman in tragedy is more entitled to play the man in her death than the man is to assume any aspect of woman’s conduct, even in his manner of death.” Chillingly and powerfully, there is, for women, “liberty in tragedy – liberty in death.” By resisting any temptation to dogmatize, to take the Greeks to task one more time for, in Epstein’s words, suppressing “women’s rights,” a remarkable achievement indeed as there were no “rights” of any sort to suppress, the concept of rights being entirely foreign to the Greeks, Loraux opens a window into the world of Greek tragedy that was, at least for me, and I assume for many others, previously closed.

Finally, Banta’s enormous work is wonderfully evocative. She begins with some rather loose definitions of imaging as “the making of visual and verbal representations . . . and responses to these artifacts at every level of society.” There is, she notes in line with Scott’s theoretical discussion, “no unity, no access to interpretive certainties, no absolutes, no guaranteed rapport between seeing and knowing in a society struggling with conventions that were in the process of creating still newer conventions.” If Banta had been in the room as I read these words, I would have kissed her. Without in any way backing off political implications; without in any way diluting awareness of and concern with gender; without in any way muting the feminist energy at work in her text, Banta offers up ideals and images that have simultaneously differentiated and “nationalized,” constructed unities and marked separateness.

She discovered that between 1876 and 1918 the images being offered about the American female to the public at large were “not only varied to the point of potential self-contradiction, they were all pervasive.” She finds the Beautiful Charmers, the New England Woman, the Outdoors Girl, even the Feminine Charms of the Woman Militant. Changes in “feminine ideals” were responses to “wider social forces, idealizations and discontents,” and themselves helped to deepen or to soften these contradictory forces. For example: promoting visions of the militant as an attractive woman, the New Woman as an affirmative idea, was taken up as one way to gain public approval of social change. At once commercial, personal, political, and aesthetic, one set of images frequently provoked a counter-set. For every Woman Militant there were several Mothers as Angels, and visions of the winged female decorated classroom, churches, and libraries. Indeed, these restrictive idealizations, for example, “Angels, We Call Them Mothers Down Here,” a 1921 pop song, invited satiric and surreal counterpoint. Banta expands upon the contributions of several authors of *Behind the Lines*, when she elaborates the many feminized ways in which America herself is and has been represented – as Columbia, as Iron Amazon, as Sacred Mother, as the Girl He Left Behind. This is a splendid effort.

Towards the end of her remarkable career, Hannah Arendt and her

colleague, the political scientist Hans Morgenthau, had the following exchange, reported in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's biography of Arendt. Morgenthau queried: "What are you? Are you a conservative? Are you a liberal? Where is your position within contemporary possibilities?" And Arendt responded: "I don't know. I really don't know and I've never known. And I suppose I never had any such position . . . And I must say I couldn't care less. I don't think the real questions of this century will get any kind of illumination by this sort of thing." Arendt was right. Those feminist texts that proclaim, in effect, "shut up and fight" or "shut *them* up in order to better fight" offer illumination into nothing except the workings of dogmatic minds and ideological projects. Contrastingly, those feminist writers and scholars who refuse to join the circle, who retain their independence of mind and thought, in the long run better serve any feminism worth its salt. By that I mean a feminist position open to debate, committed to democracy, prepared to pursue politics as the art of the possible.

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Boris Paramonov

THE CULTURE OF SOVIET ANTI-SEMITISM

With the ascendancy of *glasnost* in the Soviet Union, a certain phenomenon has come into existence, which might have been foreseen earlier, yet whose emergence now is an unpleasant surprise to the supporters of the new cultural lifestyle. Let us call that phenomenon an enormous heterogeneity in Soviet public opinion. Suddenly, not only the liberals have started talking but the conservatives as well – and the latter have proved themselves to be as aggressive and noisy as the former. I am not talking about the official conservatives – the bureaucrats within the Party and the administrative ranks – who are keeping quiet, preferring action to words, putting the brakes on *perestroika* in any way they can. I am talking about Soviet public opinion on all levels. It is shocking to discover that there is an overall Stalinist orientation in public consciousness, that the Stalinist myth seems to have survived tenaciously in the psyche of the masses. It is even more significant to find retrograde leanings in people who are regarded highly on the cultural scene. Often, they are those who cannot be suspected simply of plotting for any sort of personal gain. They are the most sincere kind of idealists, if, of course, that is how one chooses to define a complex array of sentiments, sympathies, and resentments whose most outstanding quality happens to be anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism was never a trait of the Russian intelligentsia. Moreover, anti-Semitic tendencies were considered a disgrace among the intellectuals. One can talk about the state-imposed anti-Semitism in old Russia – the so-called “Pale of Settlement,” a limiting percentage quota on university admissions, and so on – but in the first years of the Bolshevik rule the situation changed drastically. Not only did Jews acquire full legal status, many of them also found themselves in the avant garde of “socialist construction.” The next wave of state anti-Semitism was the legacy of Stalin’s last few years in power – the antic cosmopolitanism campaign, the doctors’ trial. Yet the persecutors of the Jews did not include the most respected representatives of the cultural elite. Today, however, in the epoch of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, there is an alarming unofficial cultural anti-Semitism. The membership of the notorious ultranationalistic organization Pamyat (Memory) includes not only loud-mouthed demagogues but also many people who hold advanced degrees.

In the city of Sverdlovsk the local opera house recently put on a production of Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Golden Cockerel.” The Sverdlovsk members of Pamyat discovered that the snowflakes falling on stage during the performance were designed in the shape of the Star of David, which, according to Pamyat’s statements, did not surprise them at all, since the director of the

production was a Jew. A local radio broadcast was devoted to the issue, and when the central press started to make fun of the ever-vigilant inhabitants of Sverdlovsk, one of Moscow's literary magazines came to their defense. Pamyat's activities, however, for all their viciousness, would be considered only marginal, in some kind of bad taste, if it were not for the legend of the Zionist plot against Russia, a legend still supported indirectly by people who are otherwise widely respected.

This new phenomenon does not refer to the notorious "anti-Jewish riot" that took place in November 1989 during the meeting of the Russian Republic's Writers' Union. That riot, regardless of its odious nature, was nothing but a manifestation of the material interests of those disgruntled "official" writers whose very livelihood was suddenly jeopardized when their work was discredited with the advent of *glasnost*. No one with serious claims to cultural leadership would take part in this kind of activity. Yet among the so-called "country writers," many of whom are true masters of contemporary Russian prose, such as Viktor Astafiev, Vasily Belov, and Valentin Rasputin, are those who are responsible for perpetuating the new cultural anti-Semitism. Rasputin, the most respected of the group, has openly taken Pamyat under his wing, calling its members true Russian patriots. This phenomenon is hard for any cultured Russian to accept; the only consolation is that not every Russian comes from the country.

In Victor Astafiev's novel, *A Sad Detective Story*, one finds a seemingly innocent word: the Jewish students at the college attended by the main character are called "yevreichata" (a derivation from the Russian word *yevrei*, this word really means "little Jews"). Actually, the word does not carry any overt malicious connotation: the author used a diminutive suffix, which could be interpreted as a indication of hidden contempt, but which in all likelihood would have been overlooked. However, Nathan Edelman, a well-known, recently deceased historian, chose to call attention to this apparent "slip of the pen" and wrote a letter to Astafiev demanding an explanation. Astafiev's response was blatantly anti-Semitic; he substituted the word "*zhideniata*" ("little kikes") for "*yevreichata*." Edelman treated this exchange in the true spirit of *glasnost*; he made it public through the underground *samizdat*, and it became a scandal.

Another significant event laden with anti-Semitic implications and involving the country writers has been the publication of Vasily Belov's novel, *Everything Is Still Ahead*. The villain in the story is a Jew by the name of Misha Brish. His crime consists of marrying the main character's exwife and then plotting to emigrate to America, separating the children from their natural father. Misha Brish plays the role of a demon, whose purpose is the corruption of Russian women.

Although the reputation of the country writers as champions of *pere-stroika* has suffered, the Soviet intelligentsia still considers them a significant

force in the opposition to Soviet stagnation. The country writers and those literary theoreticians ideologically close to them do criticize the Soviet past in ways that are far more profound and uncompromising than the recent criticism by liberals. For the liberals, it is Stalin who is the sole source of all the crimes of the past; the country writers, on the other hand, believe that it is the concept of socialism itself that is at the root of the tragic history of the Russian nation. (Here, it must be made clear that we are talking about socialism not in the West European social-democratic sense but as the result of the Soviet revolution. The interchangeability of the terms "socialism" and "communism" is common practice in the Eastern bloc, where socialism is considered a stage preceding the arrival of communism.)

An article by the well-known literary critic Vadim Kozhinov, "Truth and Verity," which appeared in the April 1988 issue of *Nash Sovremennik* (*Our Contemporary*), the magazine of the Russian Republic's Writers' Union, has become a manifesto for the country writers. It is ostensibly a critical analysis of Anatoly Rybakov's novel, *Children of the Arbat*. Kozhinov correctly notes the overall artistic weakness of the book and attributes its success exclusively to its "hot" theme, a psychological study of Stalin's character. Yet the discussion of the novel is only superficially the subject of Kozhinov's article. Its ultimate purpose is to address that very myth that depicts Stalin as the primary agent of evil in Soviet history. A reader who is familiar with Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* cannot help but notice how Kozhinov simply repeats some of Solzhenitsyn's ideas. For example, there is the proposition that the Great Terror of 1937 was not at all the peak of Bolshevik crimes; that the war communism of the first post-revolutionary years and the forceful collectivization of peasants a few years later did no less, if not more, harm than the infamous year of 1937. The argument is that 1937 is a date liberals tend to remember most because it was during that particular wave of repression that the intelligentsia and the party ranks were hit the hardest. Stalin was not the creator of the state-run, terror-wielding system, writes Kozhinov; its roots are to be found in a certain process of truly global dimensions, a process that evolved as far West as Madrid and spread as far East as Shanghai. It is not very hard for a Soviet reader to understand what process Kozhinov is talking about: the entire communist myth and the methods of its implementation.

Igor Shafarevich, a famous dissident mathematician and corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences, responded to Kozhinov's article by publishing his own supporting piece in *The Moscow News*, the most liberal Soviet weekly (June 13, 1988). He stated that Kozhinov was almost the first one to approach the issue of Stalin's culpability from a correct perspective. He went on to say that blaming the years of terror on Stalin's ill tempers is insulting to his victims and thus reduces national catastrophe to the level of farce. The fact that the Soviet intelligentsia is familiar with Shafare-

vich's book, *Socialism as a Phenomenon in World History* (never published in the Soviet Union but released in the West under the title, *The Socialist Phenomenon*) added weight to this argument. The main thesis of Shafarevich's book is that socialism is a socially organized implementation of the death drive; Stalinism is a logical result of socialism itself.

That Shafarevich's support lent credibility to Kozhinov's article cannot obscure the libelous and malicious anti-Semitism it contains. Kozhinov exhibited some tendencies quite worthy of the Pamyat extremists. When he wrote of the global process that spread from Madrid to Shanghai and served as the true impetus for Stalinist terror, he hinted that this process was nothing but a "Jewish-Masonic plot"; that the root of the catastrophe is indeed in socialism itself, but this socialism is the work of Jews. When citing particular agents of Stalin's crimes, Kozhinov listed only the Jewish names. Yakovlev-Epstein, Stalin's agriculture minister, turns out to be the main villain, whom Kozhinov claims is almost single-handedly responsible for carrying out collectivization. Kozhinov states that even the purge of Soviet genetic scientists, conducted with Stalin's support by the crook Lysenko, was actually a project carried out by the Jews. Lysenko, writes Kozhinov, was nothing but a tool of Deborin, a Soviet Marxist philosopher, and Present, the actual organizer of the purge.

The proponents of this new anti-Semitism have recently come out with a list of Jewish names targeted for their attacks: Kaganovich, a high-ranking Politburo member, the aforementioned Yakovlev-Epstein, Yagoda, the KGB chief until 1936, and Ginsburg, Moscow's chief architect in the 1930s, a man seen by Pamyat as primarily responsible for the destruction of the city's many historical monuments – one of the most important points on the Pamyat agenda. In this latest version of Soviet history, these are the henchmen who carried out the "Zionist conspiracy." It blatantly ignores the facts of history. For instance, correspondence between Stalin and Kaganovich, about the protests of a group of Soviet architects against plans to demolish a masterpiece of Soviet architecture, the Sukhareva Tower, was made public some time ago in *Izvestia* of the Central Committee. The correspondence makes clear that Kaganovich was convinced by the architects' arguments and instead of going ahead with the demolition plan, directed their protests to Stalin, who then himself denied the architects' plea. It is obvious that this correspondence was made public to dispel the myth that Kaganovich, the Jew, was primarily responsible for the destruction of old Moscow, a myth that the new history has since resurrected.

Valentin Rasputin, probably the most significant writer in the country movement, gave an interview that was broadcast on central television on June 26th, 1988. Here is a brief excerpt:

Why are we trying to lay the blame on only one man now? Is it because we are trying to hide those others who were helping him, or maybe even directing him? I don't understand why we are avoiding the names of people whose much greater talents demand they be brought into the light – the names of Voroshilov and Kaganovich. It seems to me that they, not Voroshilov but Kaganovich, could have quite an influence on our Josef Vissarionovich [Stalin's patronymic] in this direction.

Certainly, the words “talents” and “our Josef Vissarionovich” were not used without irony. But once again, what is really worth noticing is this tendency to distribute the weight of Stalin's crimes among his hypothetical Jewish contingent, though everyone is well aware of Stalin's own anti-Semitism. The names of Kaganovich and Yagoda are mentioned most frequently; they certainly outweigh the names of Voroshilov, Molotov, the foreign minister, Zhdanov, the chief ideologist (the last two were descendants of Russian aristocracy), Ezhov, the head of the KGB from 1937 to 1938, and finally, Beria, the KGB chief from 1938 to 1953, a Georgian by nationality. An old piece of folklore comes to mind: in Russia, when a Russian steals something they say a thief did it; when a Jew steals something, they say a Jew did it. Some of Rasputin's latest statements, quoted in *The New York Times Magazine* (January 28, 1990) by Bill Keller, leave no doubt about his anti-Semitism and his efforts to blame the Jews for the Russian Revolution and the subsequent communist rule of terror.

Behind the anti-Semitism of the country writers is a profound ideological motive. Many Soviet literary critics say that “country writing” has sung the requiem for the Russian countryside, for its tradition, its dignified work ethic, the beauty of its land – all of it destroyed by the invasion of machines, especially the village churches, which used to serve, as Solzhenitsyn wrote, as the centerpieces of any rural landscape. But above all, it is the requiem for some fifteen million peasants, victims of collectivization, exiled from their native villages, who for the most part perished during the famine and in Gulag camps. In his novel, *The Foundation Pit*, recently published in the Soviet Union after almost sixty years of oblivion, Andrei Platonov, though not tied to the country writers in the genetic sense, painted this symbolic scene: a group of purged *kulaks* is placed on an iceberg and set free to drift into the Arctic Ocean. Platonov's work is still being treated as a sensation, evidence of the fact that the wound has not healed, the problem has not been resolved. The country writers do not need to use such symbolism to tell of the real sufferings in the countryside; unlike the city-dweller Platonov, all of them come from the country. They saw it all happen with their own eyes.

The country writers' position is defined not only by their reaction against the collectivization of the Russian peasants, but also against the pro-

cess of modernization and mechanization of the countryside all over the world, against the very means of technological expansion that seem to be affecting every aspect of human life, creating our new cultural values. A comparison with the Green movement in the West wouldn't be inappropriate; it is conceivable to see the country writers' platform as primarily oriented towards ecological issues. In recent years, under Gorbachev, the country writers gained the public's sincere gratitude by successfully challenging some of the monstrous projects suggested by the Brezhnev administration, most notably the plan to rechannel some Siberian rivers to irrigate Central Asian deserts, laden with disastrous ecological consequences. Valentin Rasputin is still leading the fight for the preservation of Lake Baikal, a real Siberian gem, now in danger of permanent pollution from a military factory producing airplane tires. One of Rasputin's best works is a novella, *Farewell to Matoria*, the story of a Siberian island village about to be submerged by a newly constructed hydroelectric dam.

When we realize, however, that the country writers' concern for the environment assumes a broad ideological dimension, the comparison to the Green platform becomes inadequate. For the country writers, technological expansion symbolizes the implementation of the communist project. In other words, this project itself is reduced to the destruction of the real bonds of existence and to the substitution of artificial, machine-made ones. Murder of millions, political terror – these are all part of a global process bent on destroying nature, destroying the essence of life, rooting out the whole ontological reality. The country writers' rebellion is a rebellion of the swamp against the machines of land reclamation. This rebellion has its justifications. The experience of the twentieth century seems to have indicated that the swamp is much more valuable to the preservation of life on earth than the practice of land reclamation is.

The concerns of the country writers have been shared by thinkers in the West. Horkheimer and Adorno, in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, argue that the source of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the very orientation of the so-called positivist world-view. "The logic of domination," they said, results from belief in the possibility of shaping the world according to some man-conceived scheme, completely dominating the forces of nature and fashioning man's physical environment and his whole existence along a chartered course. They had Kant in mind, not the traditional English positivism of Locke and Hume. What is more important, however, is that for the theoreticians of the Frankfurt School, domination was the most basic characteristic of the bourgeois world-view and, in that sense, a function of this intensely activist and engaged way of relating to the universe. They base their analysis of fascism on the notion that fascism is *bourgeoisie* taken to the extreme. Later the Frankfurt School thinkers were to write that Auschwitz and Maidanek were perfect examples of the "logic of domination" carried to its

end.

Nicholas Berdyaev had written earlier that socialism actually is an extension, or a different version, of that same notion of a bourgeois society. Socialism's value system, according to Berdyaev, is not very different from that of bourgeois society: it differs only in its ostensible concern with a just way of distributing material wealth. For the Frankfurt School, however, the idea of socialism as a derivation from the essence of the bourgeois never surfaced. Their leftist leanings made them blind to the actual results of socialist practice. It was Russia that really got to feel the effects of this practice, most of all the Russian countryside, sacrificed for the myth about progress as a "struggle against the forces of nature," a myth similar to that of the "bourgeois logic of domination." It was not necessary for Rasputin, Belov, and Astafiev to read Horkheimer and Adorno to see that same motif in totalitarianism – hostility towards the organic structure of existence, towards the very soil itself, towards Marx's so-called "idiocy of the village." For them, this realization is not a result of some academic exercise; it is the stuff of their childhood nightmares, the memories of the horrors of collectivization. For the country writers, communism (socialism) is not so much a political program as a painfully obvious hatred toward the earth, its rivers, people, and creatures. It is a phenomenon of an ontological not a political dimension. For them, the Soviet agricultural crisis did not come about through bad management; it was a result of communism's innate hostility toward the primordial sources of life itself. In their understanding of communism's most basic nature, its priorities and results, the country writers are unquestionably correct. In support of their argument are the very real sufferings of those who lived under communism, as well as the sophisticated theories of those who studied it.

Why then does the ideological platform of the country writers include an anti-Semitic streak? Does a position that opposes the excesses of modern civilization have to be "organically" supplemented by a healthy dose of anti-Semitism? It is ridiculous to even ask these questions in the light of the history of German fascism, which hid behind a myth about "blood and soil," but actually exhibited a fanatical devotion to the practice of technological expansionism. Albert Speer says in his memoirs that Hitler's tyranny outdid all other tyrannies simply because he came to possess the actual technological means to promote his cause. Persecution of the Jews as the hypothetical carriers of the spirit of a groundless, "non-national" civilization (here we must recall Spengler's differentiation between civilization and culture) turned into a hysterical manifestation of that same "non-organic," life-alienating spirit the Jews were accused of possessing. It would seem that we would have learned from this experience; but as we all know, you do not learn from someone else's mistakes.

What do the Jews represent for country writers? They are the embodiment of everything urban, urban civilization, mindset, and character. In

the country prose mythology, it was the city that killed the country. For the country writers, communism itself was born in an urban, rationalist mind, and the Jew is an allegory of this urban spirit, an irresponsible experimenter devoid of all feeling. According to the country writers, Jewry is not a nationality; it is an existential state. For them a Jew is a creature deprived of all normal biological, lifelike characteristics, in whose veins flows ink instead of blood. It seems that all the country writers have to do is to substitute for the word "Jew" the word "communist," and everything will fall into its place for them.

The most highly-publicized expression of these sentiments has probably been the serialized appearance in *Nash Sovremennik* of Igor Shafarevich's tract, "Russophobia." Its main subject is the conflict between the "great people" and the "small few," that, according to Shafarevich, manifested itself during the course of any national history. He sets out to prove that there are two courses a nation's historical development can take. The first, a progressive one, is always organic in nature: it obeys certain primordial laws of being and is characterized by the integration of a set of ideas that serves as a rallying point for the national consciousness. The second is inspired by abstract theoretical ideals forced upon the nation by a select few. It is this second course of historical development that manifests itself in all sorts of "great leaps" and revolutions. And it is the "small few," usually a sect of utopians and political theoreticians far removed from life itself, who serve as the main instigators of this second, non-organic course. Shafarevich insists that these "small few" are always a group whose motivation is bound to be purely ideological, distant from the mainstream of the national consciousness. Examples of the "small few" that he cites include the *philosophes* of the French Revolution, the young Hegelians, whose ranks included Karl Marx, and the pre-1917 Russian intelligentsia. Then Shafarevich goes on to claim that in the Soviet Union of today the "small few" are the Jews, and not only the Jews residing in the country but also those who emigrated abroad and whose intellectual activity undermines and threatens the very existence of Russia: hence the title of his work, "Russophobia."

In October of 1989 Shafarevich published an article in *Novy Mir*, a long-time bastion of Soviet liberalism, "Two Roads Towards the Same Abyss," whose appearance signals *Novy Mir*'s own gradual turn to a sort of cultural nationalism. In the piece, Shafarevich claims that the dominant characteristic of contemporary civilization, both in the communist and the capitalist camps, is a certain type of technological utopia and its destructive results, man's ultimate submission to overwhelming technology and the inevitable ecological crisis brought on by this technology. This technological utopia allegedly deprives man of all motivation to pursue such secondary goals as political equality and human rights.

Let us, however, return to the country writers. The whole point of the

country writing was to pay homage to the realities of Russian life, and yet the result of failing to see the monstrosity of the substitution they have formulated is to promote further ignorance of those very realities. To explain it fully requires a move away from ideology to psychology. It seems to me that we are dealing here with a typical example of a psychological defense mechanism: projection. It is unbearably hard, and embarrassing, to come to terms with the realization that the disasters of communism were not the work of Jews, especially when one considers that it was the Russians themselves who suffered the most under communism. In our perception, and certainly in the perception of the country writers, suffering tends to lessen guilt, if not to write it off completely. This is where the search for some external enemy begins. But if there is such an enemy, it is to be found in the Russian obsession with "great leaps," from Peter the Great's "window into Europe" to Stalin's "Five Year Plan." In communism, Russians once again saw the quickest way towards Westernization, towards overcoming the proverbial Russian backwardness. Socialism in Russia suffered the fate of all big fads that get exaggerated in the provinces.

A film that takes up some of the still-thriving Russian cultural assumptions about Jewish character, *Kommissar*, shelved in Russia for twenty-one years, has appeared recently in the United States. It sharply juxtaposes the restless Russian spirit against the profound Jewish rootedness in domestic and naturalistic realities, reversing the Soviet cultural stereotypes that treat the Jew as the disrupter, the destroyer of the organic qualities of the countryside. In the film, the character Klavdia Vavilova, a female commissar in the Red Army, during the civil war following the Bolshevik Revolution, becomes pregnant and is housed with the large family of a Jewish artisan. It is she, a Russian, who leaves her child behind with the loving, nurturing Jewish family, to rejoin the fight for the "bright future of humanity," abandoning her own offspring in search of an elusive ideal.

Perhaps if they were to see this film, the country ideologists would realize that the privilege of being "rooted in soil" does not belong solely to the Russians but also to the Jews, though the latter are by definition a homeless, wandering people. Perhaps the country writers even would concede that "loyalty to the earth" is a characteristic that may be more Jewish than Russian. After all, it is the Russians who are famous for their ancient habit of burning their villages every hundred years and going to the other end of the earth in search of a better life.

David Montenegro

AN INTERVIEW WITH DEREK WALCOTT

DM: Could we start with “Another Life,” your longest poem, and, in particular, with Part One, “A Divided Child”? Would you talk about the divisions, beginning with painting, since, in the poem, you start with painting and, in a sense, end by choosing poetry as a vocation?

DW: I didn’t give up painting. I do a lot of storyboards for my filmscripts and plays, and I do them in a lot of detail. I draw carefully, although a storyboard merely dramatizes an incident or focuses on a different angle, and so on. I still do a fair amount of watercolor painting from nature. I haven’t done – as I thought I would have – much oil painting on canvas.

Last summer I strongly resolved that I’d go back to the rigidities of drawing and painting, and that I’d give myself a heavy schedule for doing them daily. But that got broken again. When I’m in the Caribbean, my prime attraction is towards representing it in painting. So I think there is still a dual attraction for me to painting and poetry.

The division one talks about I don’t think is ultimately a sort of career decision between becoming a painter or a poet. You can’t, obviously, put words into paintings, but, on the other hand, I had the absorption of the visual that is part of poetry and can be very strong, and I think that must be present in the sort of *frame* of work on a line or even a stanza sometimes. On the other hand, I have a quite different approach to what I’d like to achieve in painting. I think it’s perhaps not as – I wouldn’t say ambitious – not as arduous perhaps, not as sweaty or industrious as with the writing.

There’s more to it than that, though. The older I get, I realize that I’m a pretty competent draughtsman, and I’ll get better with practice. And the watercolors are getting better. But all I’m after really is a visual representation of a thing that I see in front of me. I am very square when it comes to painting, especially watercolor, because in watercolor you can’t really muck around with abstraction. It’s too delicate a medium. Oils can be very rhetorical, in that sense, very pretentious sometimes, especially abstract painting. So I love watercolor because it’s harder really than oils. It’s less egotistical.

So I haven’t given up the idea of painting. I suppose, in “Another Life,” the section I’d refer to would be the one that talks about what exists in the wrist of a painter – the true painter – which is a very confident flourish, a feel for the weight of the paint and how it’s confidently manipulated, that I didn’t think I had. I don’t think now that that’s necessarily a condemnation. There are different kinds of painters. There are those who layer and build, and those who slash and mount and increase the surface of the canvas by

strokes. There is a big difference between even, say, late Rembrandt and Degas. So, I may have said once that I don't feel I have the life inside my wrists to be a painter, because at the time I may have been comparing myself with other painters whose style was much more vehement than mine.

DM: Is part of your attraction to watercolor the way watercolor can catch nuances of light?

DW: Watercolor's an extremely difficult medium in the tropics. It's more or less a temperate medium, though not entirely, because you have obvious exceptions in Winslow Homer and Hopper, for instance. In the tropics, the dramatic division that exists between the horizon and the bottom of the horizon, in other words between the sky and the foreground, is extremely dramatic. It's almost complementary, in terms of the hues that are there. The incredible blue that is there in the tropics is almost impossible to get – the *heat* of that blue – in watercolor. And it may be silly to think it's because the paint is made in temperate countries. That's maybe a facetious attitude to have, but look at the palette that exists for watercolor in the tropics, where shadows are black, black-green, or contain black, which you can't really use in watercolor. And the fact that you saturate the surface of the paper sometimes with a tone on which you can dip the paint is not quite useful in the tropics. I mean here the lines are hard, but there the lines are hard-edged, and you have a very hard time manipulating them into any kind of subtlety. If you see a negative of the tropics, you realize why cameramen always find it much harder to photograph in tropic light than they do in the magic hour at twilight or right after dawn.

One other thing that astonishes and exasperates painters from the north is that what they see in front of them is a lot of green, basic hues of green, green and red. I remember I was going out to do some painting, and there was a German tourist in a small hotel where I was staying. He said he couldn't paint there because it was too *green*. I think it's the way he looks at the color. Obviously there is subtlety, an immense amount of variety in tones of the green that exist in front of you. And there is haze in the rain or early morning, and so on. But, in a way, forms in the tropics are almost emblematic; they're very hard and bright. I think that to try to capture that on paper means that the words have to be used almost as heavily as strokes are used in paint. Just to put down "blue" or "green" is not enough, because that's a postcard. What matters is how you manage to get into that blue whatever other variations and subtleties and orchestrations that one tries to get in the *words* so that you can feel the sensuality, the presence and the texture of, say, water and crisp sand, of going into cool water, that sudden change of temperature that exists between light and shade in the tropics.

DM: So it's a problem of very strong contrasts and maybe too much light?

DW: Well, if you say it's too much light, it means God has made a mistake, you know. There can never be too much light. It's the glare that is there. No

one runs away from glare in terms of what's to be depicted. That's like saying in the Arctic it's all white. But it's all ice. I don't know, it leads to a kind of literature of indolence, a concept of lethargy, you know, of the siesta, of decay, of afternoon languor that is really more theatrical than real. It's just *literary*, that idea of the tropics, really.

DM: You mentioned different types of blue. Is it that there is not a language for the different shades of blue, or the *particular* shades of blue, and, in a sense, through words you are trying to identify those shades that have not been named?

DW: A passage I always quote when I'm teaching is the first chapter of *A Farewell to Arms* in which the model is really a combination of Gertrude Stein and Cézanne. Sometimes I point out to the class certain effects Hemingway achieved by watching Cézanne. One was to let the stroke of the word "blue" appear very late in the first few paragraphs. So that the first startling stroke of the word "blue" comes much later, after the dust and the leaves and so on, and the waters swiftly moving are blue in the channels. Now, *what* blue is not described, but the point is that the stroke is put down with exactly the same cubic area that a Cézanne stroke is put on a bleached background. Or, say, the rocks or trees are skeletally or sparingly indicated, and then that stroke appeared next to another hue – a blue or a lilac, and so on. Hemingway's technique comes from a scrutiny particularly, I think, of watercolor.

DM: What stereotypes do you have to break through in language to bring out the reality of the tropics?

DW: Well, you know, every truth becomes a cliché after awhile. I came on a break this summer from St. Lucia to Boston. On the first or second day, I thought my body would burst from the humidity. The acute, implacable discomfort that I felt in the house was nothing compared to the kind of heat that exists in the tropics. It can be fierce, scorching sun there, but you've got only to step into the shade to be cool. And that contrast is – in terms of temperature – melodramatic. So when people give an image of the tropics as a place of swelter and indolence and exasperation and languor and idleness and so on . . . well, I was devastated by the humidity of a northern summer. Now if we amplify that kind of cliché to say, well, in hot countries nothing is ever produced, we would have to say that for the bulk of time that summer represents in all northern countries *nothing* can be produced. And it should not be, if you're going by that kind of geographic description of what is expected of certain locales. Whereas more can be produced in the summer in the Caribbean because it's cooler. So that concept of the tropics being a place of intense heat where nothing happens and nothing stirs makes for good fiction, but it's not true.

But I'm going deeper than simply the climate. I'm thinking of an attitude that's both geographic and historical. Hot countries, until the emergence of the Latin American novelists and poets, were not supposed to produce anything.

It's a sort of Graham Greenish fantasy about the tropics that was perpetuated. But Greece is a hot country, and you've got to ask: What has Greece produced?

DM: What other divisions have come into play in your life besides painting/poetry, light/sound?

DW: I suppose the biggest cleft, the biggest division, the biggest chasm is cultural, in a way. Obviously – however jaded a subject it is, and I do feel jaded talking about it – race is an enormous one. Not for *me*. I look at the chasm, I don't share it. But it's obviously here. And it seems to have widened every day in America. As an observer, I think the reality of saying this is a further fact that the Constitution of the United States is so democratic. Not only is the Constitution almost defensive in its democracy, it seems to say daily that *despite* this or that, people are equal. And it's the *despite* part, I think, that I experience as active day to day now. And that is quite frightening.

Not just racism. I think the examination that is required is to ask: Is one inhabiting a kind of fallacy or fantasy, a sort of suspended Constitution within one's daily life that is not enacted by various races, whether it's by the Italian or the Jew or the Black or the Puerto Rican? And what holds that fantasy together? It's basically fragile. It's more like a rotten string than anything that really binds all the various races around the concept of democracy. And that is, I think, perhaps the most frightening aspect of America. As absolutely beautiful and true as the ethics of the Constitution are, the reality of them moves further and further away daily, I think. And one must, of course, adhere to and believe in the principles that are there. But they have been turning into a kind of gospel as opposed to a reality. You read the New Testament and see the same thing, that men must love one another, and Christ is the example, and so on, but nobody lives the New Testament. And it may be that, in this democracy, the equivalent of the New Testament is in the Constitution. So one does not actually live it; one can only believe that it exists and pay homage to it, as a sort of inside faith, but not in practice. I've spent some years in America now, and that separation is as if the Constitution were a church that you go into from time to time and come out of. Monday morning you don't adhere to it; the citizens do not go by that faith.

DM: So a person pays homage but goes away without being held to practice?

DW: No, I'm not saying it's not practiced. There are some fantastically astonishing things in the practice of democracy in America that continue. Among them, the press's relentless, self-adoring idea of justice is useful. *Many* things work and keep the bonds strong. But it's the one constitution that says you must do *this*. It's the closest thing to the New Testament instruction that exists. But now, I think, it's become as remote, in a way, as the concept of brotherly love. It's not a *paradox*, it's just a frightening kind of fantasy.

DM: It seems almost as if, because of the diversity of cultures and races in this country, people have become gradually *less* tolerant of difference.

DW: You have to go into a very deep reason why that is so. It would have to do, perhaps, with the economic structure of the country, in a place where the width between those who have property and the people out in the street, the homeless, is staggering. The multiracial aspect of the society can be visually exciting, as it is in New York. But in a city like Port of Spain in Trinidad, you see a more active multiracial tolerance practiced in what is supposed to be a backward, smaller country than you would in any city in the States, and certainly in New York now. But I don't think it's simply because of the size; I don't think it's simply because of the hustle and the competition and the capitalism and all that. I think that there's a lot more to be said for the excitingly real variety of races from all over the world that exists in the concentrated place called Port of Spain. I'm not pretending that there isn't a lot of hostility and prejudice – if you wish to call it that. But I do not consider it to be really profound. I think the day-to-day exchange between the Indian, the Chinese, the Portuguese, the Syrian, the Black, and so on has historical depth and guilt attached to it, but the daily practice of that life in that city is not one that contains any threat of violence. You're always on the edge of violence in every city in America – of racial violence. And why is that? I think it's got to do with money: it's got to do with who protects those who have the money.

You can use the same argument, I imagine, in the ex-colonies. But there's also a way of life that is different. There's a sort of elation about life, I think, an enjoyment of it that is totally separate. And if you want to talk about division, *that's* a division to me when I come here. When I come back here I find that I'm clenching my teeth a little more, I have to shout a little harder, I have to keep pointing out that I'm not ready to take anything from anybody, and it's really a back-up attitude, you know. Not because I'm black, but because I think it's the average experience of anyone in the street.

DM: Your work is dominated by poems that are set out-of-doors. Much poetry in northern countries is indoor poetry. This suggests a different relationship to nature.

DW: No. I don't think that entirely. The closeted and hermetic poets that exist now in northern poetry may have as much to do with syntax as with climate. The sort of tight-sphinctered, monosyllabic thing that passes for good verse these days is not only a matter of weather, of people staying inside. The pages of a lot of great American poets like Frost and Whitman are ventilated by wind and by weather. And it's very easy to call them nature poets – any of these adjectives that come before poets just to be dismissive. *All* poets are nature poets – or poets by nature, which is the same thing really. But I know what you mean, that there is a kind of closing in of American poetry that I don't think has really to do with the outside or the

inside because you can get stanzas written by people who may be in Montana, and the poetry still feels closeted, it still feels tight. It's some sort of screwing tight of the mind that has happened, I think, which may be derivative of a *misreading* of William Carlos Williams, a misreading of Japanese or Chinese poetry. A lot of people who practice what they think is Chinese poetry forget the *width* of the thing, and think it's all minimal and modest. There's a great epic width to Chinese poetry. It's an immense country. And when somebody talks about a river in China, it's not a brook up in Vermont.

I *do* feel that American theater is closeted and chambered and dark and small and so on. But why is that? I think what's missing is a kind of width of the imagination that very few American playwrights have. Alien subjects aren't approached. They aren't wild enough, I find, for the size of the country. If you measured the height of American theater – when I say height I mean in terms of its concept and what it dares to do – you'd imagine that it was written in a country no bigger than, say, half of Wales.

DM: So it's almost agoraphobic?

DW: Well, it's enclosing; it is shuttered. There are a lot of themes that are just not approached by American writers. One of them, obviously, is the epic of the Indian or the epic – in theater – of crossing the country. I don't just mean the Western; I mean something with a scale and width to it like Whitman's poetry. You don't get that feeling of scale in American theater. And it doesn't have any *tribal* power. It's all very hermetic and private and individualistic and diaristic. It's very prosaic and journalistic, in that sense, and very conservative in form. I suppose why I say that is to point out that when one talks about an outdoor theater, there's no outdoor literature. There's no reason why American literature shouldn't have that width to it.

DM: In northern literature, is there a feeling of having been pulled up by the roots?

DW: I speak from a position of luck and privilege, because I share two climates, but perhaps the fact that poets keep wearing shoes, you know, gives them small feet or tight feet and corns. A lot of modern poetry is like having corns. It hurts. It's tight and small.

And I don't mean just going barefoot up on the Cape. What I mean is to be barefoot in spirit. Maybe I'm being too Gravesian, but I think if that doesn't happen poetry dies. If a man keeps walking on leather, on concrete every day of his life, and if you take that to represent the spirit of poetry, then it's going to get corns, it's going to get withered and chilblains. I think the poet goes unshod, and that's for the whole feel of the thing. To walk about barefoot, as Whitman said, really is the first need.

And the shape of the human foot is not a matter of style. A lot of modern poets are stylists. It's French prose poetry or it's Williams or its southwest or whatever. It's like different cuts of shoes, styles of shoes.

DM: In *Midsummer*, you say: "No language is neutral." Could you expand a little on this?

DW: Well, I think the surrounding text may help. Obviously, when you enter language, you enter a kind of choice which contains in it the political history of the language, the imperial width of the language, the fact that you're either subjugated by the language or you have had to dominate it. So language is not a place of retreat, it's not a place of escape, it's not even a place of resolution. It's a place of struggle.

DM: So, particularly in colonial countries, *any* choice of words – this is an exaggeration – is, in a sense, a political choice, or there is a stance involved?

DW: Well, in a way, it's only the proportion of stress that matters. It's surely more theatrical for people to say to what is called the third world: Well, you have inherited this language and how do you feel *in* it, and that sort of nonsense. But obviously in a country of tyranny, there is a political choice involved. The next word you write could get you in jail, really. You avoid the next word or you put it down at the risk of whatever happened to all sorts of poets in that totalitarian regime. And, in a sense, if you expand that and intensify it within yourself, and you make yourself your own regime, when you're as dictatorial and as threatening to yourself as you are, it's the defiance of that inner regime that makes you choose, and not cower, in the courage of using the right word.

If you use a political metaphor, I would say that every poet is imprisoned in a system that is himself, that he is *jailed* in himself, and that that effort to get out of that jail is the struggle he has or the defiance he has in having the guts to use the next word without the safety or the cliché of repetition. And that inner political action of the choice of the next word, if it were broadened and taken out into a visible arena, is not any different from being on the witness stand in front of a regime. And the regime that is rigid is the one that says inside himself: Are you conforming to a tradition which is a regime or being *outré* and fake revolutionary to astonish the regime, or are you simply writing as honestly as you can without self-astonishment, without self-congratulation, without self-heroism or even martyrdom, and continuing by the process and the line that you think is true to the language that you are working in? The inner prison that exists is one that's outside and yet is inside the totalitarian regime. I consider that to be obvious in our time. And whether it's Mandelstam or Herbert or Milosz or even Seamus Heaney in the conflict in Ireland, there is an inner prison that one recognizes in oneself, and one is both judge and prisoner. But you don't plead and you don't whine; you state the condition.

DM: And, in a sense, you're always guilty.

DW: Well, guilty until the next time [laughter]. But, no, you don't stay in guilt. I really think that – not for the poet but obviously for the race in the twentieth century – poetry has never been more urgent than it is now. What we

have are regimes that are not just opposed to the idea of poetry because it is seen as something effete, but as something that is really threatening. We're in a time of ideas, *heavy* ideas, not ones that are as emblematical or as simple as, say, the Church versus the State. We are in a whole area of conscience that is articulated, that has to be articulated within the regimes themselves. Looking at a poet like Seamus, for instance, it would be very easy for him not to concern himself or to concern himself on a level where his conscience is not so tortured. It would be very easy to write a kind of poem which is abstract and which is theoretical. But to share, to be involved in – take someone like Adam Zagajewski – is not only physical. There is a small community of conscience that exists all over the world now that brings poets closer together into a very small brotherhood. They may come from anywhere, from India or Poland or wherever. But it's like a concentration camp.

DM: Is there another danger of oversimplifying, of taking an issue at face value and writing a poetry that has a pro and con?

DW: Exactly. Those choices are even more demonic than those raised by the average, say, nature poem – if you want to call it that – because the temptations are enormous. One can then move into being bard, spokesman, martyr, even coward as a role. And all of these are roles offered by the regime, by the *exterior* regime, and the poet can be tempted, without knowing that he has been tempted, to become any one of those. I think a lot of great poets at some point move into that kind of high flatulence in which they may be believing at the time that they are absolutely necessary, that their voice, that particular pitch of the voice is necessary for the time. It exists in all great poets, but it's just that part of the great poet that you turn from and say sometimes: Oh, give me a break, knock it off, cool it down, you know – whether it's the “prophetic” vision of a bitter prophecy or whatever it is. Unless it has that kind of *total* devastating light or blight that exists in Blake, for instance, who is talking the truth. You sometimes hear it in Yeats, you hear it in Virgil, you hear it in Frost. It is that bardic voice that, after a certain age, a poet is attracted to without knowing that he is on a platform bellowing.

DM: The theater gives you satisfactions that poetry might not, or allows certain parts of your voice to express themselves that poetry does not.

DW: Well, there's a bit of sadness about poetry. Once a poem is finished and it goes away, it's severed from you, it's not yours. Whereas in the theater, the playwright is the one who takes all the blame and the burden. And, of course, there's the sharing of that elation or that despair by several people. Twenty people, thirty people can be in that boat together. So, in a sense, yes, the personal elation, when it's multiplied, can be ecstatic. But also, by contrast, so can the personal despair for which you are responsible. Multiplied by twenty – right? – this makes you twenty times more depressed than if you wrote a bad poem [laughter]. If you write a bad poem, you just throw it away or hope you realize it's a bad poem. If you write a bad play, you

never know it's a bad play until you really hear the groans.

DM: What about the line itself; when the actor begins to speak the line, does it lift itself off the page and change into something else?

DW: No. the poetry that survives in the theater survives by itself. It isn't *made*; it can't be *created*. If it's there, it's there; if it's not, no amount of lighting effects and terrific acting can make it happen. I sometimes give my students exercises in which they read their own lines. If you take a lyric poem and treat it dramatically, the embarrassment you can feel in reading a line that is not on the page but is coming out of the human mouth is acute. So I do a lot of that with the writers in the class. You learn a good deal either way. You learn that a line that may pass by the ear and be forgiven and slide by *grates* in the theater. Of course, the other threat is pomposity because you can elevate theatrical speech into making it sound extremely good, but that's the voice getting up on a platform, you know, and performing.

DM: In your poem, "Nearing Forty," you implied you were trying to strip your style: "the household truth, the style past metaphor." In your recent book, *Midsummer*, you seem to be more spare, almost impatient with artifice, almost impatient with poetry itself, and yet these poems are extremely concentrated.

DW: But there can be *clear* concentration. I mean a drop of dew is clear concentration, because it can reflect an entire universe. In the little window in a dewdrop you can have that. The clarity that one wants and never *will* get but one lives all one's life for is, I think, to become an element, if it were possible. To become water, you know, to have no coloring, no obvious source, no artificial source, no frame. And, in a way, as one who is dealing with time, you think of the component of water, the element of time in the stillness of water. In a sense, that's the kind of simplicity that one strives for. I mean you wish to live to be ninety so you can try to be as clear as that in the effort. Larkin has a poem that says: "If I were made to construct a religion, it would be of water." Pasternak says it about water, about simple nouns. Or Rilke says it – just to put that word down as if it were the first time, as if it had an element of simplicity. And I think there are periods in the epochs of English poetry in which again one comes back, as Wordsworth did, at a certain point, to something that is – not illiterate and not dumb – but *clear*, a simplicity that may contain a lot of knowledge in it, like Blake's has. The simplicity of Blake is a profound simplicity that has all the cosmology and myth that is in his head. But when he gets to putting down his monosyllables, that's the clarity one is talking about, something that is an elemental, unmeasured, unscannable kind of clearness. And one is talking, I think, about memory, really. How direct is the word to human memory? The word put on the paper should be not *read* but remembered when it is read. The moment of reading is a moment of remembering, not a moment of learning.

DM: Distillation, in a way, and expansion at the same time?

DW: Yes, it's Blake's grain of sand.

DM: In your poetry some words seem to have a different meaning than in most poetry in English. Take the word "sugar," for example. The costs of sugar, the human costs are alive in the poetry, which makes the word new, in a sense, or reveals what the word really means.

DW: Well, the word "wheat" for me will always be a literary word. It's a word out of poetry; it's not a word out of agriculture for me. It's not a word that I know – it's not a *world* or word that I know. When you plant wheat, that's *work*, but wheat in tapestries, wheat in literature becomes a pastoral word that has no work in it, in a sense. I think that may be the difference, because sugar is not a pastoral, though it may appear to be a pastoral thing. The fields of sugar in the Caribbean are divinely beautiful, are supremely calm and so on, but there's a lot of blood and sweat in the earth for it. I think the same is true of wheat, and when a northern writer writes about wheat, he's writing close to the idea of bread, of survival. The wheat in the Bible is hard-work wheat; it's not a literary word. The same thing would be true, I imagine, of olive oil in Greece or, if you change places, of the coconut. For one person it's picturesque and archaic and literary. For another person it's something that smells and grows.

DM: What voice leads you from line to line?

DW: I was thinking today, at fifty-seven I may have not wanted to be a poet but an anthology, which I don't mind, because I enjoy so many voices that my own is irritating. So what you ask, what leads me from line to line, I *hope*, is any poet who is inhabiting the next letter. If poets can shift like shadows and an *A* may belong to Dante, and a *J* to Homer or Pasternak, those letters aren't my property. And I just hope I don't have the vanity to believe that they are. So what leads me, I imagine, leads anyone who is serious and admits the generations that precede the word, and one is only adding, if one can, to that general sound, with a very small sound of one's own. I think every poet of any modesty hopes to make just a small contribution to the sound of the world's hum, and does not by any means wish to be individual or be praised for his style or whatever.

Just to come to a conclusion, and not because he's my friend, I think Seamus Heaney, for instance, could have done a very nimble thing. He could have danced away conspicuously, with great levitation and skill, from the haunting shadow of Yeats, and turned into something very aggressively different. But he knew that gradual absorption *would* lead to his own voice. And, for instance, in the phase that he's now gone through in his last book, *The Haw Lantern*, his use of the abstract noun as a whole territory and not just as an abstraction is very different from the way Yeats emblematically used abstract nouns. Seamus uses a language now that is not concentrated and fine and provincially exquisite or right, but one that is passing into a language of understanding, of exchange in a territory where the *blocks* of the

polysyllables exist as solidly as if they were nature. And how does that happen? It happens because Heaney allows the voice in.

Poets who frantically try to escape any accusation of sounding like anyone else, who bloat themselves up, are the ones who have eventually sort of floundered.

DM: In your earliest poems, there's already a maturity in the voice. Somehow your poetry doesn't evolve, in a sense, as if you were whole at the beginning. And yet there are many changes. What would you say the changes are over the span of your poetry?

DW: I agree with that. I'd say only the suffering is different, the quality of the suffering is different. You see, one can have an unembarrassed conversation and say at fifty-seven, without any fake humility, that I was a prodigy in the sense that I wrote very well very young. *Tonally*, it sometimes amazes me that I don't seem to be any different from when I was eighteen. You know, it seems to me to be the same person talking. Now that may be an imitation, because there may be no wisdom there. But it may be in my nature, and may be in the nature of the eighteen-year-old writer, to *avoid* wisdom. There's a kind of prerogative attached to wisdom, which has to do with style. There are certain great poets who achieve wisdom, and it's very inseparable from style. Yeats and Eliot are two who are full of wisdom, but you can't separate the wisdom from the style. The wisdom of Eliot is the style of Eliot; the wisdom of Yeats is the style of Yeats. But the wisdom of the Bible is wisdom; the wisdom of Isaiah is wisdom, and so forth.

I think that that openness is what I've always had. I have been very flattered, as opposed to being insulted, when I've been told that I sound like someone else who was great. I always considered that to be an honor and not an accusation. You see – and maybe I have a medieval mind – I'm really part of a *guild*. I don't consider myself to be an individual. And if I were working as a stonemason in a guild, that would be my contribution to the cathedral. If I was an apprentice to Leonardo, I would feel terrific if someone said, this is as good as Leonardo, or you got this from Leonardo. Obviously, I'd say, yes, thanks very much. But the twentieth century – and especially in this country – is obsessed with the idiosyncratic genius, the doing your own thing, having your own style. It's like the movies. It turns everybody into a movie star. Television extras – there are no extras in American poetry.

DM: In "Sea Grapes," you say: "The classics can console but not enough." Does this need any explanation?

DW: Well, I don't think so. All of us have been to the point where, in extreme agony and distress, you turn to a book, and look for parallels, and you look for a greater grief than maybe your own. You can immerse yourself for awhile in that tragedy, and hope there will be some elation, as tragedy's supposed to provide. And it does. It provides a distance – the distance of character, of experience, and you can distance your own experience through

this. But the truth of human agony is that a book does not assuage a toothache. It isn't that things don't pass and heal. Perhaps the only privilege that a poet has is that, in that agony, whatever chafes and hurts, if the person survives, produces something that is hopefully lasting and moral from the experience.

DM: You've never had to deal with any type of censorship, but is the lack of an audience – aside from other poets – a type of, not censorship, but of silencing by neglect or indifference? What does this do to the voice, the silence of not being heard, in a sense?

DW: Well, I've always wondered about the sense of isolation of the American poets that is *so* acute in contemporary American poetry, especially the generation of Lowell and Berryman and Jarrell and the others. How come there was such adulation and yet such isolation at the same time? And how come so many made almost a frantic claim to the right to be poets in a culture? I'm not an American, so I don't go through that. I really, in the Caribbean, am not treated like a literary figure. And it's extremely healthy because, in a way, I'm really left alone. It makes you very much your own judge and your own applauder, unfortunately your own audience. At the same time, it also does not make a social crisis out of the idea of being a poet, as it does here.

I think the thing about being a poet in America, or even a young poet in America is the poet is almost crying out for the society to be hostile to him – or her, I mean both him and her – to repress him, to take notice, to imprison him, to pay attention in a sense. But what happens is suddenly or quietly there is a very wide blandness that occurs, in which the poet is subtly absorbed and given a name and a trade *separate* from the society, maybe because of that naming. You are a poet, you write poetry, you get your books published, you're in magazines. And you don't go around with a cape and a rose, so you can't tell in this democracy how different being a poet would be. And I think that it is this real unnavigable but hospitable space ahead of the poet that finally makes a lot of them say, I'll just do something else. And that is another kind of death, really, that happens. It's not some big dramatic thing. It may not be like breaking your pen and fleeing into the jungle or something. But there's something that just quietly absorbs and deadens the spirit. And it's not inertia, because Americans are vigorous, industrious, honest – that's the quality of American activity – direct, forthright. Pay you what you deserve, reward you with what you get, etcetera. It's a just society, and not a cunning one. And it isn't that you want more evil, but it may be a very, very spiritually satisfied society – or apparently spiritually satisfied society. It can't be disturbed. It's like making a lot of noise in a void room. And I think that when that voice begins to sound as if it's being raised for effect or lowered so that attention can be paid to it, that middle ground is not found, you see. And then, in a way, the poet goes

into a kind of isolation. He may be on the Pacific coast, or he may be alone on a farm in Iowa, or he may be in a loft in New York, or he may be teaching in Boston, but there's no *necessity* in him.

DM: Communication?

DW: Yes, he doesn't feel needed. By luck, by blessing, I feel needed. I feel very needed. In the Caribbean, meeting people anywhere, on a beach somewhere, talking to poor people, to fishermen, a guy in a store, anybody, I feel as if I could speak for them. When that is missing, it's deadening.

DM: I think I'll leave you in peace.

DW: Deadening is a terrible word to end on [laughter].

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Amitai Etzioni

LIBERALS AND COMMUNITARIANS

I. Toward the I & We

Communitarians charge contemporary liberal philosophers (CLP) with an excessive focus on individual rights and with neglect of obligations to the community, to shared virtues and common purposes. While CLP evince a measure of commitment to a moderate vision of community, they contend that communitarians provide an insufficient basis for individual rights. Communitarians, in turn, indirectly acknowledge the need to ensure these rights in order to avoid collectivism. Out of these charges and countercharges, a synthesis begins to suggest itself.

Less Individualism. In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls founded a conception of justice on respect for the individual. Individual persons and their self-chosen ends are primary, the common good or general welfare, subordinate:

Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others.

Rawls arrived at his notion of justice by considering what individuals in the “original position,” a reformulation of the state of nature, would choose as “principles of a justice for the basic structure of society.” In this hypothetical “original position” individuals are “rational persons concerned to advance their interests,” stripped of particular attributes. They debate behind a “veil of ignorance” which prevents them from knowing their future position in society. This uncertainty leads these rational individuals to choose a just order. For example, no one in the original position would rationally argue for a system that favors men, because that person might “end up” a woman. Rawls’s philosophy thus emphasizes the primacy of the individual, and it derives social attributes mainly from the aggregation of individuals’ rational choices. Whatever concept of community or substantive good Rawls’s theory allows for is based on the preferred choices of individuals. The CLP conception of the self is based on the Kantian transcendental ego – a subject given prior to its ends. Rawls reformulates the Kantian subject, stripping away its metaphysical trappings, recasting it within “the canons of a reasonable empiricism.” However, the basic concept of the Kantian ego remains intact: the native of the Rawlsian original position, the abstract self, “is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it. . . .”

Rawls's theory has been interpreted in various ways. Some find him somewhat more concerned with community than he admits. Without entering into this argument, I believe that Rawls's position remains primarily a rights-oriented, individual-choice liberalism, although his work has become somewhat more communitarian over the years.

The rights-based ethic of liberalism, as articulated by Rawls and by other noted CLP, including Ronald Dworkin in *Taking Rights Seriously*, and Robert Nozick with *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, has faced a recent, growing challenge from the communitarian critics. Robert Thigpen and Lyle Downing, in their essay, "Liberalism and the Communitarian Critique," for instance, were concerned with "the presence of moral chaos and the absence of common purposes" in contemporary society, and Michael J. Sandel, in his book, *Liberalism and Its Critics*, wished to give "fuller expression to the claims of citizenship and community than liberalism allows." They have faulted liberal theory both for its conception of a freely-choosing, autonomous self, cut off from all social moorings, and for its lifeless, impoverished conception of community and the common good.

MacIntyre, for example, in *After Virtue*, rejected the possibility of theorizing about justice with an abstract self as the subject:

. . . particularity can never be simply left behind or obliterated. The notion of escaping from it into a realm of entirely universal maxims which belong to man as such, whether in its eighteenth-century Kantian form or in the presentation of some modern analytical moral philosophies is an illusion.

In *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Sandel argued that Rawls's representative rational agent "fails plausibly to account for certain indispensable aspects of our moral experience," because we are not, and cannot be, entirely autonomous agents, "independent in the sense that our identity is never tied to our aims and attachments." Sandel maintains that people are always "situated" or "embedded" in a social context, and "encumbered" by ties of community.

Communitarians are further troubled by what they see as a weak conception of community and common good, or shared moral values. They point out that the "strong" CLP (or libertarian) position holds that individuals' ends are either competing or independent, "but not in any case complementary." To libertarians (among them, Nozick), social arrangements are essentially "a necessary burden," and "the good of community consists solely in the advantages individuals derive from cooperating in pursuit of their egoistic ends."

True, for moderate CLP, the community is far more than a "necessary

burden.” Indeed, Rawls contends that a “well-ordered society” founded on the principles of justice possesses “shared final ends and common activities valued for themselves.” Rawls sees just institutions as “good in themselves” because they provide each individual’s life with “a more ample and rich structure than it would otherwise have.” That is, individuals may see and indeed benefit from a just society, but it is *they* who change it, for *their* individual purposes. Dworkin, too, has argued that attempts to impose any preferred way of life are illegitimate.

In sum, moderate formulations of CLP allow for some vision of community, beyond a mere aggregation of self-interested individuals; however, CLP, including Rawls and Dworkin, hold the community to be secondary, derivative and reflecting a rational choice of the individual – with whom all basic rights rest. Yet CLP have shown some flexibility: recently, both Rawls and Dworkin have modified their positions in response to communitarian criticisms. In his essay, “Justice as Fairness,” Rawls conceded that the basic values of the representative moral agent – now called the “citizen” – derive not from intuitions but from “an ‘overlapping consensus’ that undergirds the modern state.” Further, Rawls acknowledges social and historical particulars – namely, the “democratic society reflected in contemporary, advanced, Western, industrialized nations” – that implicitly inform *A Theory of Justice*. In kind, Dworkin now considers his fundamental concept of “equal concern and respect” to be historically and politically embedded. As John R. Wallach observed in “Liberals, Communitarians, and the Tasks of Political Theory”:

Contrary to communitarians who fault Rawls and Dworkin for not paying attention to the “shared meanings and understandings” of historical societies, each claims that the ideas he previously called intuitive presuppose them.

It seems that CLP, both through their critics and their advocates, have moved toward recognizing an important sphere beyond the individual. However, despite these steps, CLP remain committed to principles that must be modified and supplemented if the middle ground is to be evolved. As Wallach notes, to claim that “the debate between liberals and communitarians has collapsed . . . overstates the distance Rawls has traveled since 1971.” First, liberals continue to hold that individual liberty, protected by individual rights, takes priority over any and all common good, rather than treating (as I will attempt to) individual and community as moral equals. Second, the liberal concept of the individual remains atomistic at least in that liberals do not recognize community as a constitutive element of the self.

Moderate Communitarianism. While CLP maintain the primacy of the rights-bearing individual, communitarians seek to establish moral coherence

within society, the moral foundations of a common good. For communitarians, the shared moral values, “virtues,” and traditions of the community, rather than the rational choices of abstract individuals, are the bedrock of moral-philosophic discourse. They see persons as “implicated” or “embedded,” or as “citizens” who share a set of moral values by virtue of their membership in a community. According to Sandel:

... if we are partly defined by the communities we inhabit, then we must also be implicated in the common purposes and ends characteristic of those communities.

And according to MacIntyre:

... we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. . . . I am a member of this or that guild or profession . . . I belong to . . . this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. . . .

Moreover, this notion of common good has a dynamic element: communitarians see the community and individuals as working toward a *telos*, a common purpose or goal, not fulfilled in society today.

Because CLP affirm a plurality of individual ends, as Isaiah Berlin says, “equally ultimate,” they look to a theory of *procedural* justice, such as Rawls’s, to adjudicative frameworks that do not presuppose a particular conception of the good. On the other hand, because of their concern with community and the common good, communitarians tend to focus on systems or institutions, substantive entities that embody their moral values. Two leading communitarians, Alisdair MacIntyre and Michael Walzer, highlight the communitarian approach – and point toward the need for developing a principled basis for individual rights.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre articulated a “strong” communitarian vision of a moral community, premised on the idea that the moral foundations of modern society are incoherent, fragmented; he contended that “we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.” His conception of the exemplary moral community derives from the Aristotelian tradition of civic virtue, where persons are understood to achieve a *telos* by exercising virtues (particular “acquired human qualities”) to attain the intrinsic goods of “practices” – complex and coherent, “socially established,” shared activities in “arts, sciences, games, politics . . . the making and sustaining of family life. . . .” Communities that function through this involved scheme find their moral basis in “shared understandings,” in

common assumptions.

Individuals in such a community do not (as CLP would have it) choose their own good; they find a common good as members of a distinct moral order. Each person seeks to learn and exercise the virtues and achieve the internal goods of practices, to discover and achieve *telos* (what Aristotle called *eudamonia*, loosely translated, human well-being), and in this “education,” each finds that “my good as a man [or woman] is one and the same as the good of those others with whom I am bound up in human community.” Nor can the *search* for the good be an individual enterprise – the community provides the only legitimate context.

In *Spheres of Justice*, Walzer, a moderate communitarian, formulated a system of distributive justice based on shared moral values. Walzer maintains that each community confers particular meanings and values on goods, and from these common values, distributive justice derives:

If we understand what a good is, what it means to those for whom it is a good [i.e., to the members of a certain community], we understand how, by whom and for what reasons it ought to be distributed. All distributions are just or unjust relative to the social meanings of the goods at stake.

Walzer casts these shared meanings and values within a pluralistic framework to create his notion of “complex equality.” Since different goods have different social meanings (and thus, different principles of distribution), these “spheres” of goods ought to be kept autonomous. Complex equality arises, then, when a good in one sphere, such as political office, cannot be “converted” into the good of another sphere, such as entrepreneurial opportunities.

Walzer’s defense of plural social meanings and values leads by implication to the ideal of plural subcommunities that flourish within a broader, latent community. Thus, he represents a more moderate communitarian stance than MacIntyre, who talks of “the pluralism which threatens to submerge us all.” Further, Walzer develops his notion of community against a “background” of rights, asserting that individuals have the right to “life and liberty,” and other rights “beyond” those. (While he acknowledges certain rights, Walzer does not make clear whether individuals can choose freely among the autonomous values of various subcommunities. He seems more intent upon drawing out the latent meanings of the community as a whole.)

While the notions of shared moral values and of community are firmly grounded in these works, some critics contend that the status of the individual is precarious in the communitarian vision. Communitarians do not establish

effective boundaries against collectivism; and they do not provide a sound basis for the self to transcend social roles and assume a critical stance against society. Sandel's position illustrates the problem:

As a self-interpreting being, I am able to reflect on my history and in this sense distance myself from it, but the distance is always precarious and provisional, the point of reflection never finally secured outside the history itself.

MacIntyre does not clearly separate the self from its social roles and corresponding ends. He claims that "what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles." Such a separation is necessary if individuals are to evaluate the moral status of practices; indeed, MacIntyre concedes that "there *may* be practices . . . which simply are evil . . ." for example, "torture." But in MacIntyre's world persons could not criticize evil practices, for they would not be able to transcend the social roles tied to these practices.

Affirming some measure of individual rights guarantees autonomy. But MacIntyre claims that "natural or human rights . . . are fictions." Rights presuppose "the existence of a socially established set of rules . . . [in] particular historical periods under particular social circumstances." MacIntyre's project is thus one of duties, of the obligations of membership.

Individual rights are not soundly protected in Walzer's philosophy, either, as his treatment of personal autonomy demonstrates. "Justice," Walzer contends, "is relative to social meanings . . . Every substantive account of distributive justice is a local account." Bound to the particular social meanings of the community, individuals may be unable to evaluate the moral standing of their community, that is, to be autonomous and critical.

As James S. Fishkin has indicated in "Defending Equality: A View from the Cave," Walzer's work "lack[s] shared understandings about how to interpret whatever shared understandings actually exist among us in our culture," that *Spheres of Justice* establishes no sure footing for the autonomous individual, no map for how to disagree with or how to challenge shared meanings.

Individual rights, then, are not secured in these communitarian visions. Communitarians indirectly have acknowledged this difficulty; indeed, in their attempts to avoid collectivistic implications of their work, they point the way to a synthetic position. MacIntyre, for example, writes that exercising the virtues does not entail ". . . the liquidation of the self into a set of demarcated areas of role-playing." Sandel talks of the "enduring attachments and commitments which taken together *partly* define the person I am." Walzer admits (although vaguely) that individual persons may not be entirely subjected to "shared meanings" when he refers to "those deeper opinions that

are the reflections in individual minds, *shaped also by individual thought*, of the social meanings that constitute our common life." For communitarians, then, the moral force of community is a central, perhaps the central constituent of the individual, but they maintain that it is only a constituent and not the entire self.

Philip Selznick, in "The Idea of a Communitarian Morality," provided another reason for a synthesis, arguing that there is room for individual rights within a communitarian morality. He contends that communitarian philosophy's central value is "*belonging*," and he interprets this claim to mean that "personhood is best served in and through social participation." The result in communitarianism is the priority of duty over right; "duty is what roles are about and what membership is about." Thus, as he points out, when we accept membership in, for example, the academic community, we think first of our responsibilities, not our rights. Contrary to MacIntyre, however, Selznick contends that *rights-claims can be legitimate*: "A duty-based community is not . . . insensitive to claims of right. . . . A moral community must recognize . . . natural rights . . . which derive from our understanding of what personhood requires." Yet rights are not central to the communitarian project, for "rights do not define the community," nor do they provide reasons for acting. Duties, to the contrary, "summon us to action."

The I & We. The synthetic position suggested in both philosophies is the I & We paradigm, the idea that both individual and community have a basic moral standing; neither is secondary or derivative. In this paradigm the We signifies social, cultural, and political, hence historical and institutional forces which shape the collective factor – the community.

Such a position may seem elementary, almost obvious. However, many social theorists have been one-sided. To Bentham, for example, "community is a fiction." And much of psychological and neoclassical economic as well as other social sciences literature, is reductionist; that is, it maintains that the explanatory factors are individual, and either denies the need for collective concepts or depicts them as the result of aggregations of individual transactions. Typical is the argument that there is no public interest, only interests of specialized groups. Still others, from Sartre to Nozick, consider the "community" a burden if not "hell." And, of course, collectivists – both totalitarian and dogmatic religious – ignore the role and rights of individuals.

Even those CLP who "consider" community, or communitarians who "consider" the individual, do not, as we have just shown, accord both elements a *basic*, primary moral status. CLP, at best, grant community a secondary status, in the sense that they do not override individual rights, and at most overlay claims when these do not conflict with individual rights. Communitarians, on the other hand, tend to grant individual rights a secondary position. Indeed, work by both sides reads as if prizes were awarded to those able to build their whole moral position upon one primary moral building

stone.

In contrast, my own view is that both the individual and the community have the *same basic primary* moral standing. Hence, all specific positions – whether on the rights and duties of AIDS patients, pornography dealers, or the press (versus national security) – must be worked out with careful attention to both. One cannot use the needs of society – or individual rights – to shut out the other considerations, as, for instance, do First Amendment absolutists.

Three considerations, empirical, moral-philosophical, and pragmatic, support the I & We paradigm. First, while it is possible to theorize about abstract individuals apart from a community, if individuals were actually without community, they would have very few of the attributes commonly associated with the notion of the autonomous person. Clearly, *the individual and the community “make” one another*, and individuals are not able to function effectively without deep links to others, to community.

Many sociologists have contended that community has weakened within modern society, adversely affecting individuals. Eric Fromm, for example, has argued that individuals won excessive autonomy as industrialization, or more precisely, urbanization transformed society. He believed that this extreme autonomy was gained at the cost of weakened social bonds in both the family and the community, leaving the individual highly anxious, even hysterical, looking despairingly for synthetic affiliations to replace the lost bonds. Hence, totalitarian political movements provide a proxy for such bonds. And the decline of religion and “traditional values” left people yearning for firm direction, provided by demagogues and dictators. In a similar vein, David Riesman agrees that people have become other-directed, seeking to conform because they have lost inner orientation.

The I & We position also finds support in that radical individualism or collectivism taken alone lead to policy conclusions that even their own advocates are often uncomfortable with. For those who recognize only the primacy of the community, who consider individual rights either secondary and derivative or assert simply that “there are no such rights,” as MacIntyre does, open the door to the intolerance, or worse, the tyranny found not only in totalitarian ideologies but also in absolutist theology and authoritarian political philosophies.

Equally unacceptable are positions that focus exclusively on individual rights, particularly the extreme libertarian stand; few endorse policies, as Nozick does, that allow individuals the right to choose whether or not they wish to defend their country. The same challenge to the libertarian position holds for other common goals very widely endorsed, from concern for future generations to the condition of the environment.

Finally, there are pragmatic considerations: will the I & We paradigm facilitate the development of both public policy and norms of behavior that

members of relevant communities will consider compatible with their principles? For example, in 1983 Morris Janowitz highlighted the problem by citing a study of young Americans, who seek to have the right to be tried before a jury of their peers, but not the obligation to serve as jurors.

A more complex application is to be found in the pornography debate. Jean Bethke Elshtain, for example, has written an interesting article on the philosophic implications of the opposing positions taken by feminists and civil libertarians (as well as neoconservatives) on the question of pornography, "The New Porn Wars: The Indecent Choice Between Censorship and Civil Libertarianism" (*The New Republic*, June 25, 1984). Feminists, she noted, have chosen to fight pornography with the same conceptual tool that libertarians use to defend it – the language of individual rights. Feminists argue that pornography violates the civil rights of (individual) women; libertarians respond that limiting pornography violates the right to free speech. Elshtain concluded that "... the idea of [individual] 'rights' cannot bear all the weight being placed upon it. But without reference to rights, how can someone press the case for cultural change in a *liberal* society?" She approached the problem partly from a communitarian perspective, suggesting that "communities should have the power to regulate and to curb open and visible assaults on human dignity. Thus, Elshtain implicitly conferred upon the community a prerogative to determine the boundaries of a particular value – human dignity. She limited this prerogative, however, by warning that communities "should not seek, as groups avowedly do, to eradicate or condemn either sexual fantasies or erotic representations as such."

In her book, *Democratic Education*, Amy Gutmann, seeking to formulate a position recognizing both individual rights and a substantive good, has developed some basic principles for the I & We paradigm. Gutmann's position rests on the belief that the democratic society, broadly conceived, is a "good" society, and thus worth preserving. In all societies, she argues, institutions shape members; only in a democratic society do members have an effective voice in shaping those institutions.

Gutmann further contends that each generation must be educated "to deliberate critically among a range of good lives and good societies." Two principles secure this deliberation against the possibility that democratic communities may undermine themselves. The first, nondiscrimination, requires that all members of the community acquire the capacity to deliberate, for otherwise, the participation necessary to democracy will be endangered. The second principle, nonrepression, prevents the state and any group within it from restricting access to alternative views, enabling "rational consideration of different ways of life." In Gutmann's terms, nonrepression thus maintains that "nobody be *required* not to be exposed to alternative viewpoints" (private communication).

Gutmann's approach is usefully applied in situations such as a Ten-

nessee court decision to exempt Fundamentalist Christian children from reading books that their parents found offensive. The court held that the parents had “drawn a line” based on their religious beliefs, and that the court could not call this line “unreasonable.” Gutmann’s principle of nonrepression suggests that the court erred: the children will not be exposed at home to alternative viewpoints, and the state cannot require the parents to teach such viewpoints. Hence, the public schools provide the only occasion to expose students to a range of different beliefs, a necessary process if they are going to deliberate rationally about alternative ways of life. In disputing the court’s ruling, Gutmann reiterates her substantive conception of the good: the “content of public schooling *cannot be neutral* among competing conceptions of the good life”; rather, democratic education must “prepare future citizens for participating intelligently in the political processes that shape their society.”

Other public policies based on the I & We position, for instance, are the market (should it be regulated at all?); the balance between AIDS patients’ rights (to privacy) and obligation to community (to disclose sexual contacts); “mandatory” seat belts; due process for disruptive students in high schools; and the balance between the First Amendment and national security.

II. In Focus: Which Community?

While the basic issues of the CLP-communitarian debate so far discussed involve the theoretical orientation that the I & We provides and seeks to develop and amplify, there still is the matter of clarifying the focus, to which no answer seems readily apparent. This philosophical dialogue, it seems, would benefit significantly if the participants would, when using the term “community,” indicate which community they mean. Sandel, for example, alludes to “a common vocabulary of discourse and a background of implicit practices and understandings.” By this criterion, a football game, an undergraduate study group, and an annual lumberjacking convention all would qualify. Instead, communitarian notions of community ought to be explored in terms of scope (hundreds or millions of people; small groups or mass society); substance or “content” (moral, political, religious, or cultural entity); patterns of “dominance” (how the community expresses its values, interests, commitments, and ends).

Scope. When focussing on concrete political issues, writers most often refer to a small “local” community – a town, city, or county. Sandel, for example, espouses “laws regulating plant closings, to protect . . . communities from the disruptive effects of capital mobility and sudden industrial change,” and suggests that communitarians would be “more likely than liberals to allow a town to ban pornographic bookstores, on the grounds that pornography offends its way of life and the values that sustain it.” Gutmann considers “the explicit concern for preventing the disruption of local communities. . . .” Elsewhere, Sandel calls for the revitalization of community, local and national.

Several of his respondents (in *The New Republic*, May 9, 1988), both communitarian and liberal, took the small, local community as the subject of debate, whether or not agreeing on the need to revitalize it. Elshtain, lamenting “city and community powerlessness,” talked of “recapturing civic empowerment at the peripheries.” Robert Reich argued that “the liberal task at hand is not to add legitimacy to the spurious notion of geographic community.”

Other communitarians envision community on a grander scale. Walzer believes that in the real world, “independent states” – entire nations – approximate most closely his notion of community; his historical examples include the Hellenistic city-states as well as the medieval Jewish community, in which “social pressure worked very much like political power.” MacIntyre also conceives of a nation or city-state community; he seems to consider Athens in classical times a representative community. Thus, for some communitarians, the nation or city-state is an alternative to the smaller-scale local community. Exploring yet a broader perspective, Walzer considers a community comprised of “humanity itself . . . the entire globe . . . But were we to take the globe as our setting, we would have to imagine what *does not yet exist*: a community that included all men and women everywhere.”

Substance. Considering various notions of size leads to the more significant issue of substance, the content or nature of the community, for the concrete expressions of a community’s scale – town, city-state, nation, or neighborhood – may have social, political, economic, moral, or other underpinnings. The difficulty here is that the communitarians do not draw on one clear substantive account of community. For example, Sandel does not say explicitly what makes a local residential area or municipal government a community. However, his notion of community as a “common vocabulary of discourse and a background of implicit practices and understandings,” suggests that a town or a city is a community by virtue of a latent cultural consensus. Sandel’s repeated references to “moral experience” further suggest that the community has a moral dimension, expressed in people’s “constitutive attachments.”

Walzer suggests, similar to Sandel, that a community is distinguished by its “shared understandings and intuitions,” a common fund of meanings. He explains that in its pure form, such a community is only a theoretical construct; in reality, “political communities” are “. . . probably the closest we can come to a world of common meanings. Language, history and culture come together (. . . more closely here than anywhere else) to produce a collective consciousness. The implied community is, like Sandel’s, essentially cultural-moral, presumably found in small locales, and sought for in more encompassing ones, even in nations, worldwide, via the United Nations.

While Walzer interprets the political community to indicate the presence of a latent cultural or cultural-moral consensus, Benjamin Barber, in his book, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, sees the political

community as an end in itself. He espouses “strong” democracy, a politics of universal participation, in which “all of the people govern themselves in at least some public matters at least some of the time.” Barber’s conception of community involves not as much the substance of a particular cluster of “shared understandings” as the process of political participation. He envisions the nation as a town hall, and it is through the activity of direct participation that Barber fashions his community and the individuals within it. Public activity is elevated from a means to a community goal: “To participate *is* to create a community that governs itself, and to create a self-governing community *is* to participate.”

The Responsive Community. Perhaps the central issue of these various interpretations of the substance of community is how the community expresses, affirms – versus imposes – its common values, ends, and interests. A three-part classification is helpful here. First, values may be imposed by the state, which makes for a coercive community. Alternatively, values may be imposed by a “tight,” nonpluralistic community, lacking moral alternatives – a Salem-like community, whose punitive force is largely psychological (fear, humiliation, isolation, degradation). Finally, values may be affirmed (here, we avoid *imposed*) by what is called a “responsive community,” a noncoercive community that appeals to the “nobler” part of the self, and one that in turn the self finds compelling.

One important source of the reluctance to accord full moral standing to the community is the view that any and all community voices are coercive. Nineteen-sixties radicals referred to economic and psychological “coercion,” for instance, arguing that there was no basic difference between a police state (Stalinist Russia) and a capitalist society that forced farmhands (and many other workers) to labor at demeaning jobs for low pay, and subjected its citizens to media and junk-culture “rape.” Libertarians often take a similar position, by simply not recognizing a difference between the state and the community; both are viewed as “making” people behave in the name of the collectivity, without regard to differences in means. Libertarians assume that both intrude unduly on decisions that autonomous individuals (conceived as independent of community) are to make. CLP, Elshtain explains, see the individual as free not only from state coercion but from “a public morality he may not share,” and free as well from the intrusions of his neighbors into his “private affairs.” She adds:

Civil libertarians cannot get beyond a picture of isolated individuals, bound up in their “freedom from,” going through the world *en garde* against possible constraints from concerned and potentially “repressive” communities.

Social conservatives construe the issues in equally extreme terms when they argue that those opposed (as liberals are) to state-imposed religion (for example, prayer in schools) or a ban on abortion, are simply “against” religion or “for” abortion. The possibility that one may favor certain values but seek for them to be supported via the moral appeal of the community – and not forced by the state – is lost.

While the concept of community may harbor the threat of coercion, it is not necessarily the coercion of the state, but the moral compulsion of a Salem-like community. Sandel does not describe the institutions that would sustain the moral community he envisions, but, as we have seen, the individual is subject to the shared understandings, the collective consensus of the community. In MacIntyre’s project, the potential for moral pressure by a monolithic community is more tangible – and threatening. “Practices,” interpreted within the context of “traditions,” are the institutions that structure individual lives; the societal “virtues” are the “acquired qualities” that enable individuals to achieve the intrinsic goods of a collectivity. And we have seen that MacIntyre does not provide a sound basis for the individual who criticizes the socially fostered practices. MacIntyre’s community, then, is morally domineering because human activity is sharply defined by and limited to a distinct constellation of practices – and these endeavors are the only means through which an individual can find moral meaning and worth in the community. The person who does not follow them is necessarily an outcast, for the community lacks in its moral vocabulary legitimate alternatives and the capacity to allow, respond to, and benefit from critical and innovative individuals.

The I & We paradigm builds on the concept of a responsive community, one that appeals to values that members already possess (“Only you can prevent forest fires!”) and encourages them to internalize values they currently do not have (before an appeal to prevent litter will be effective, individuals are called upon to concern themselves with the environment). This type of voluntary moral affirmation and education provides solid foundations for a noncoercive community. When people act to express a value they have truly acquired within a pluralistic community (internalized rather than accepted as a social pressure to which they had “better” conform), they are not, nor do they feel, coerced, even in a psychological sense. There is nothing morally objectionable about such an act; on the contrary, without the expression of internalized values, there would be no social coherence or community – or for that matter, functioning individuals.

Andrzej Bryk

POLAND AND THE MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

Henry Grynberg, that patient guardian of the murdered Polish Jews and a Polish-Jewish intellectual, wrote once:

We, Poles and Jews, have been brought together by the harm which was done to us. Not the losses, since those were borne separately and are incomparable. But what was done to the Jews before Polish eyes is an injury not only for the victims, but also for the witnesses . . . If the Poles are a nation traumatized by all the calamities of history, it is easy to imagine how traumatized is the Jewish nation. It would seem that the Poles, better than anyone else, understand the Jews and manifest that understanding before world opinion. Why do they not show it?

The intensity and honesty of the recent debate in Poland about the Holocaust is unparalleled by anything that has happened between the Poles and the Jews during the last half of the century. It is also a fulfillment of Grynberg's hope.

The Holocaust has always been a problem in Polish postwar consciousness. The real issue is not the question of Polish complicity with the Germans during the war or of whether the Poles did all they could to help save the Jews. The question of complicity is a problem for the collective national conscience of the Austrians, Ukrainians, Latvians, French, or Slovaks. And in Poland, under the most severe German occupation, the question of complicity with the Germans was a relatively marginal phenomenon and should never be discussed without at the same time citing the Polish rescue efforts, the only case in Europe where the punishment for such efforts was the death penalty. The real issue in Polish culture is that of moral indifference and silence after the Holocaust.

The German annihilation of the Jews was a tragedy for Polish collective consciousness, since it ended nearly a millennium of coexistence between the Poles and Jews at a most poignant and inflamed moment. It resulted in an amputation of an integral part of Polish society, which meant that Poland – in the words of a Polish writer – was “deprived of a chance to play to its end that many-centuries old coexistence in diversity and to play it to its end in a civilized way, a way which would enrich both partners.” Polish Jews, in 1939 one third of the world's, created a unique Jewish-Yiddish civilization living in a mainly unassimilated way next to the Polish population. Despite a deterio-

rating relationship since the end of the nineteenth century there had been, among Poles and Jews, a close attachment stemming from countless commercial and neighborly ties. And this is why the Nazis could not murder the Polish Jews without at the same time murdering something that belonged intimately to the Polish nation. Unfortunately, until very recently that annihilation that constituted a moral offense against the conscience of Polish culture has not been properly understood.

There are many reasons why it happened that way. The Poles were themselves decimated. As a nation they did not collaborate with the Nazis; on the contrary, their resistance was heroic. As Israel Gutman, Director of Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, stated, "This feeling of identification of Poles from all social spheres and their anti-German solidarity is a previously unheard-of historical achievement and one of Europe's greatest under Nazi occupation . . . all accusations against the Poles that they were responsible for what is referred to as the 'Final Solution' are not even worth mentioning."

The feeling of defeat caused by the era of Communist domination discouraged the Poles from looking at their past, to confront morally poignant issues. The resurgence of anti-Semitism after the war testified to the fact that the Poles put the moral issue of the Holocaust beyond the pale of discussion. Another domination caused them to muster all the sources of national tradition, bad and good ones, for defense. Anti-Semitism belonged to the former.

The great Polish-Jewish culture is dead and cannot, of course, ever return. This state of affairs has made some fear that it would prove impossible to integrate Polish-Jewish history into Polish history. But with the advent of the Solidarity movement, a reawakening has come. It is impossible to understand the recent discussions about Polish-Jewish relations without putting them in the much larger context of the discovery of the other Polish past, without an awareness of the desperate attempts to find in the Polish tradition some guidance in coping with the sense of despair about the state of contemporary Poland. In this sense, coming to terms with the Polish-Jewish past is an exercise in freedom, an education toward freedom. The liberalization after 1980 made it possible to advance a new conception of Polish history where the contributions of minorities could be integrated.

The reexamination of the national past has had to include the recognition that the Jewish civilization which existed in Poland for centuries is now completely gone. There is curiosity about the Jewish past but combined with the problematic nature of that past. The Jews have not simply vanished. They are absent in a peculiar way. They have been present in private conversations among the older generation, in a truncated way in Polish history books. They have not been present as a legitimate and natural part of Polish history, but rather as an emotional part despite all the disclaimers to the contrary: through denials, omissions, or bargaining about right and

wrong. The subject of the Jew “joins” other histories (especially Polish-Soviet relations) which Poles are trying to disentangle from the mass of distortions and lies that have pervaded communist versions of history.

Discussions about the Polish-Jewish past started with the founding of Solidarity but did not proceed rapidly. Claude Lanzmann’s film, *Shoah* – although it was a selective portrayal – shattered the complacency of public opinion in Poland. The film was characterized in the government press as “anti-Polish.” But when it was shown in Poland in 1985, indignation gave way to reflection. It provoked a wave of thoughtful articles in the official as well as the independent press.

A long review was published by Jerzy Turowicz, editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, the independent Catholic weekly in Krakow, which has enormous prestige in Poland. Turowicz, a leader of the antitotalitarian intellectual movement after the war and a member of one of the very few prewar Catholic groups, *Odrodzenie*, which fought anti-Semitism, argued correctly that *Shoah* was not objective and reflected the common Western practice of stereotyping Polish-Jewish relations. Yet, sensing the problem of the modern Polish consciousness, he added: “Anti-Semitism cannot be squared with Christianity. The Church condemned anti-Semitism. We have the right to be apprehensive that this teaching has not been accepted yet by many Catholics. Polish Catholics who were the witnesses of the tragic fate of the Jewish nation, seeing what anti-Semitism could lead to, should have conducted a deep soul search as far as the sin of anti-Semitism was concerned. I say it . . . with pain that such settling of accounts . . . has not been done yet.” He wrote that the accusations of Polish collaboration with the Nazis were slanderous. Anti-Semitism in Poland, however widespread before the war, had nothing to do with the annihilation of the Jews. The racist anti-Semitism of the Third Reich was a leap into murder, the dimensions of which the traditional Christian anti-Semites were psychologically and morally unable to enter.

Yet Turowicz made a confusing qualification: “In Poland . . . all manifestations of Polish anti-Semitism [of] the last forty years had a clearly political character and had no Christian character.” Turowicz was not totally convincing. Discussion of the issues accelerated. An argument about establishing a Carmelite cloister in Auschwitz erupted. The case got publicity through an appeal from a Catholic organization in the West, The Church in Need, which began to collect money for the cloister. Two elements of the appeal especially angered Jews: the hint that the Jews needed to be converted and the presentation of the cloister as a testament to the triumph of Christianity. The latter claim was particularly offensive because the Holocaust could be seen as the inadvertent culmination of an anti-Semitism that also flourished in the Catholic Church.

Two Polish-Jewish intellectuals writing in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Josef Lichten and Stanislaw Krajewski, noted the insensitivity of the appeal, but

stressed that the conversion of Jews was not the aim of the Carmelite Sisters. They added that although Auschwitz was also a museum and a place of lay ceremonies, it was unnatural that religious organizations, including Jewish ones, were absent from it. They also hinted at some of the problems in the Polish consciousness of the Holocaust. Krajewski stressed the fact that for the Poles, Auschwitz symbolizes not the Holocaust but terror against prisoners subjected to slave-killing labor and executions in the concentration camp. The fact that Jews, brought to the gas chambers from all over Europe, were subjected to total and instant annihilation in the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp was played down. On the other hand, Krajewski added that the Jews and others in the world do not understand that in Auschwitz hundreds of thousands of Poles were also murdered and that Auschwitz for the Poles is also a "sacred" and "forsaken" place. Krajewski hoped that the existence of a prayer house might encourage Poles to confront and understand Jewish sensitivity connected with the Holocaust and that the prayers might cause the Church to recognize its sins toward the Jews. He commented that the need for such a reminder is depressing and pointed out that there are falsifications in the Auschwitz museum itself.* Turowicz stressed the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust and accepted the notion that although the Nazi racist ideology was fundamentally pagan, "It would be difficult to deny the tragic connection between that pagan anti-Semitism . . . and the centuries-old tradition of anti-Semitism having Christian roots."

Then the topic of Polish-Jewish relations was taken up in *Tygodnik Powszechny* with an unparalleled gusto in 1987. Thus began the most candid discussion about anti-Semitism in modern Polish history. The debate was started by Jan Blonski, a professor of literature at Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Blonski's article attempted reconciliation and appealed to Polish consciences to recognize the anti-Semitic past. Prompted by a realization of the abyss between Jewish and Polish perceptions of the Polish-Jewish past, Blonski tried to bridge the gap by focusing on the moral problem of the Polish attitude towards the Holocaust, "We must cease to justify ourselves and to haggle over details . . . but must first say: yes, we are guilty." Blonski went on more specifically:

* The recent controversy over the Auschwitz Carmelite convent was an unfortunate distraction from the Polish-Jewish dialogue. There is little one can say in defense of the incomprehensible break of the Geneva Accords (moving the Carmelite sisters to the interfaith center outside of the camp in recognition of the uniqueness of the Jewish martyrdom in Auschwitz, although not its exclusiveness). Cardinal Glemp's remarks, at best insensitive and at worst highly xenophobic, added fuel to the controversy, but they were met with swift condemnation by the forces of opinion in virtually all circles of Polish society. Since then, the Church has begun construction of the interfaith center. The Minister of Culture in the Solidarity government declared in turn that the Auschwitz museum would be changed, eradicating the distortions and giving proper place to the Jewish martyrdom.

We . . . should acknowledge our moral . . . responsibility . . . Full responsibility? Also a shared responsibility for the genocide? I can already hear . . . loud protests: "For God's sake, we did not take part in the genocide." "Yes, that is true," I shall reply. "Nobody can reasonably claim that the Poles as a nation took part in the genocide of the Jews . . . So why talk of . . . shared responsibility?" My answer is this: "Participation and shared responsibility are not the same things." Our responsibility is for insufficient effort to resist. Who of us could claim that there was sufficient resistance in Poland? . . . Yet more significant is the fact that if in the past we had behaved only more humanely, genocide would perhaps have been less imaginable. . . more difficult to carry out, and almost certainly would not have met with the indifference and moral turpitude of the society in whose full view it took place.

Blonski dismissed accusations of complicity as groundless, yet he challenged the common Polish myth that to be a Pole is to be in solidarity with the persecuted. His article immediately became one of the most hotly debated pieces of journalism in postwar Poland. Turowicz, flooded with letters, stated that despite the denials, the reactions confirmed that anti-Semitism in Poland – practically without Jews – still existed.

The most serious attack on Blonski's article came from Wladyslaw Sila-Nowicki, a lawyer, defender of political prisoners in postwar Poland, a member of the anti-Nazi underground and of the anticommunist underground after the war, for which he spent six years in jail. For him, "Blonski's article could be . . . understood . . . as an endorsement of the incessant anti-Polish propaganda, which had been conducted . . . by the enemies, not simply of government, or the system . . . but of the Polish nation." Sila-Nowicki argued that anti-Semitism before the war was limited, that the conflict between Jews and Poles was basically economic, and that Jews had refused to assimilate. During the war, stated Sila-Nowicki, the behavior of the Poles was exemplary. The Jews' own passivity before the Germans made impossible any effective assistance from Poles.

In contrast to Blonski's and Sila-Nowicki's articles, which represented the extremes of the discussion, Teresa Prekerowa, a historian, provided a calmer voice: "In the face of German plans to . . . annihilate the Jews, Poles were helpless as a society. Only individual rescue attempts had any chance of success. And those attempts could have been much more extensive." Prekerowa also challenged the assertion about the passivity of the Jews.

Kazimierz Dziewanowski rejected Sila-Nowicki's complacency:

If in our country, in our presence several million innocent people were murdered and we could not prevent that and save them, then this is . .

. . . a tragedy so great that it is understandably human and proper that those who survived should be anxious . . . and that they are gnawed by their consciences . . . You are calm, you are not afraid. But not me. I know . . . that in this matter it can never be proved that we could not have done more.

In a long interview, Krajewski, in turn, brought out some harsh truths:

Jews see Poland as a forsaken place where Jewish culture flourished a long time ago, then it got worse and worse, it all ended in tragedy, and there is now only painful absence. . . . With Germans the situation is straightforward. They murdered the Jews. They do not deny that. Both sides can talk about that openly. Poles and Jews have not reached that stage, although the Poles did not annihilate the Jews. . . . The Poles are defensive. To accept . . . that the fate of the Jews was different from that of the Poles during the war is difficult to articulate. The Poles look at themselves as victims of history. It is difficult for them to bear the thought that someone could suffer more. . . . They think that they could not inflict any harm on the Jews because the victim cannot victimize. . . . But there are myths on both sides. I see my role as trying to dispel them, to make the Poles realize the Jewish experience, to make the Jews understand that anti-Semitism is not the essence of Polishness.

Turowicz, in his response to the discussion, rejected numerous myths he believed were still accepted by many Poles: the equation of the fate of the Jews with that of the Poles during the war, of Jewish “passivity,” of the widespread availability of help for the Jews. He took issue with anyone who claimed that anti-Semitism before the war was not strong, adding that its history in Poland had to be unhesitatingly faced and responded to by Poles for the sake of their collective conscience.

The discussion in *Tygodnik Powszechny* reverberated in the government press as well, and here the responses – mainly negative – were varied. Some tried to be objective, some clearly showed, despite disclaimers, their anti-Semitism, some treated Poland as a “besieged fortress” and viewed remarks like Blonski’s as providing arguments to the enemies of Poland. In the underground quarterly *Krytyka*, in a widely-reprinted exchange in 1987, Solidarity leaders Wiktor Kulerski and Adam Michnik tried to articulate some of the methodological problems. Kulerski stated, “Contemporary Polish anti-Semitism is a painful distortion in Polish social life and testifies to indifference towards the Jewish plight during the Holocaust.” Michnik, mentioning that he was of Jewish origin and that he thought it proper to make this known, disagreed:

Philo-Semitism is always a reaction to anti-Semitism as philo-Polonism is a reaction to persecutions suffered by the Polish nation. These are noble reactions borne out of moral decency . . . It is not the soul of the Polish nation that is poisoned, it is the souls of anti-Semites that are poisoned . . . anti-Semitism is not a specific feature of the Polish nation but a characteristic of particular groups in many countries. Historically, anti-Semitism has never comprised the totality of Poles. To talk about "Polish anti-Semitism" masks the real anti-Semites . . . Who argues that Poles fear responsibility for anti-Semitism absolves all anti-Semites of guilt, because who is responsible for everything is responsible for nothing . . . I consider as false the accusations that Polish society is responsible for "abstention" during the Holocaust. This is a blind alley and leads the just into the false temptation of atoning for sins never committed. People who have never been anti-Semitic do not have any reason to feel guilty.

Michnik captured the essence of the debate in Poland:

The discussion about anti-Semitism in a country where there are no more Jews is not a discussion about the attitude towards the Jews, but about the attitude towards the world, about the model of Polish culture; it is about whether Poland should be a tolerant country or xenophobic and parochial . . . Whatever the anti-Semites say, they do not care about the Jews. There are no more Jews in Poland and will never be. Anti-Semites care about expressing their frustration and showing their idiocy. We should stop blaming the Polish nation for the sins of Polish xenophobes. Let's forbid them to use Poland's name cheaply. Let them never defend the good name of Poland. Let them defend exclusively their bad name of anti-Semitic aberration.

In response to the debate, I decided to examine school textbooks, since they influence and reflect "common" knowledge. Generally, Polish textbooks treat the fate of the Jews during the war in a confused way. The distinction between the concentration and the extermination camps is blurred. In the eighth-grade textbook, the distinction between the concentration camp in Auschwitz where over 200,000 people were murdered, in large part Poles, and the extermination camp in Birkenau where about 2.5 million people were murdered, about one million four hundred thousand of them Jews from all over Europe, about 100,000 of them Poles, and the rest mainly Gypsies, is lost. The reader is given the impression that these concentration and extermination camps were general camps for Poles and different "nationalities" from all over Europe. In a textbook for high school students, a very unclear chapter, "Extermination of the Polish, Jewish, and Gypsy

Population,” depicts the terror towards the Polish population, and then goes on:

The greatest danger for the existence of Polish society was direct physical extermination. Since 1941/42 a majority of about 2,000 extermination centers were located on the territory of occupied Poland. The biggest was Oswiecim-Brzezinka (Auschwitz-Birkenau). In the spring of 1943 there were nearly 100,000 people there. Those chosen for death the Nazis sent to the gas chambers . . . At the same time four extermination camps were also created: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. Death was a common occurrence in other Nazi camps . . . The Polish population also perished in the camps outside the Polish lands.

There is nothing about the Jewish population, and the impression is left that these extermination camps were built for the general destruction of all Poles instead of specifically for Polish and European Jews. Even if the confusion in the case of Auschwitz-Birkenau is somehow understandable, it is indisputable that in Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka only Jews were killed. Not until the end of the chapter does the author state, “Starting at the end of 1941, the incessant deportation to the concentration and extermination camps was directed against Polish Jews through liquidation of the ghettos.” Then a short description of the Final Solution follows including correct statistics. Yet the distortions in these textbooks overwhelm the true picture, and they are especially blatant considering that elsewhere the uniqueness of the destruction of the Polish Jews is recognized.

Both the eighth-grade and the high school textbooks also repeat standard and recently questioned characterizations of Polish-Jewish relations. In the textbook for the eighth grade we read: “The large part of the Jewish population accepted its fate passively . . . There were also among the Polish Jews individuals who collaborated with the Nazis. As well among the Poles there were demoralized individuals who took advantage of the tragedy of the Jewish population . . . Their activity was met with wide condemnation on the part of the Polish population. The Polish underground took up the fight to support the Jews, resulting in their own death sentences.” The paragraph is not so much false as incomplete. The help extended by the Poles is acknowledged, but there are exaggerations and untrue statements. In the textbook for the eighth grade, the author describes the activity of the heroic Polish group “Zegota” created to help the Jews, but then again stresses the passivity of the Jewish population. What follows is a justification of Polish inactivity by that purported Jewish passivity: “When in 1942 the Germans began the liquidation of the ghettos, the terrified and deceived Jewish people allowed themselves to be taken to the concentration camps without any

resistance. When the Home Army headquarters gave orders to rescue deportees, and the fighting units – with heavy casualties – liquidated the German guards of the transports, the Jews being transported did not want to escape. So the AK stopped attacking the transports . . . the organized fight began only in the final state of the liquidation of the ghettos.” In the high school textbooks, the author gives a fantastic number of Jews saved by Poles – 200,000. The number given in the eighth-grade textbook, 100,000, is closer to the truth. The standard history textbook for university students devotes little space to the fate of Polish Jews during the war or the subject of Polish-Jewish-relations, repeating many clichés. Recently, under the Solidarity government, there has begun a thorough revision of the school textbooks, and all of these distortions are being thrown out.

My textbook survey prompted me to conduct a poll in 1987 among children in selected primary and secondary schools in Poland and among students of institutions of higher learning. The poll was taken in two towns, Warsaw and Krakow. Although not exhaustive, it may give a partial answer to what Polish youths think about the Holocaust. The first question I asked concerned the fate suffered by Poles and Jews during the occupation. Among the primary and high school students, about eighty percent stated that the fate of the Jew was unique and incomparable to the Polish fate. Ten percent discerning the difference qualified it by “rather, yes,” “in principle, yes,” and so on. Ten percent answered “no,” with the comment that the Poles were the next to be killed. Among university students, only one (out of about five hundred) equated the fate of the Jews with the Polish fate. The rest were aware of the difference between the situation of the Poles and the Jews.

The second question: “What was the attitude of the Polish population towards the Jews?” brought more diverse results. Below the college level, about seventy percent reflected the standard view very much visible in the textbooks, that the Poles helped the Jews as much as they could, despite the deadly dangers. Close to thirty percent stated that Polish attitudes were not uniform, without elaborating. Among the college students, about fifty percent stated that the Poles helped the Jews as much as they could; about forty percent answered that the attitudes varied; that some helped, some betrayed the Jews; that the majority of Poles were indifferent. About ten percent stated that the mood of the Poles was unfavorable towards the Jews, without explaining further.

The next item raised was that of “the attitude of the Jewish population towards the Germans.” The results here did not differentiate the primary school children from the rest. About eighty percent stated that the Jews resisted and fought the Germans with all the means possible; ten percent stated that there was a desire to survive at all costs; the rest answered that the Jews were passive and did not resist.

The last question was: “In your family, have you heard recollections

[if so, what] from the war about the Jews?" Among the children at the primary and secondary schools, over eighty percent stated that the horrible plight of the Jews during the war had occasionally been mentioned in the context of war movies with Jewish protagonists. The rest stated that the topic had never come up for discussion, although there were several answers which avoided the actual question, stating that the discussion sometimes centered on the prewar activities of the Jews, and that in an unfavorable context. About fifty-five percent of the university students had discussed the topic of the Holocaust with their families and friends, mainly in the wake of the Blonski article, with a division between the older generation and the younger, the older in the majority objecting to Blonski's statement. Forty percent stated that the topic was mentioned in connection with war movies. The rest had not discussed it in their homes, although some mentioned that sometimes they heard stories in their families about the Jews before the war, and that these stories were mainly centered on the theme of Jewish competitiveness in the professions and commerce.

There was a visible division between students of the humanities and the others; the former usually were much better informed. Although the picture that emerged from my survey is not completely clear, I would risk a statement that in general Polish school children have, surprisingly, a rather decent grasp of the realities, although this is essentially a matter of interpretation, especially as compared with the general historical consciousness of the Polish youth, which is far from accurate. It also may show that the youth in general has been impervious to official half-truths and distortions. One has to be rather cautious, however, since the survey was conducted in the larger towns, where the exposure to information and culture is naturally much greater than in the countryside.

My experience of public lectures about Polish-Jewish relations may be pertinent here. The atmosphere usually was tense and the discussion heated. It was apparent that there was a division between the older generation, partially displaying old prejudices, and the younger generation, largely free from them.

Jewish history is coming back to the younger generation of Poles in other ways. A large number of books on Jewish subjects have been published in the last few years. Two institutions devoted to the study of the history and culture of the Polish Jews have been established, at Jagiellonian University in Krakow and Warsaw University. There is a growing movement among college students, mainly those studying architecture and art, to help restore the Jewish cemeteries destroyed by the Germans or devastated after the war. Although examples of the old prejudices can still be found, many churches and Catholic intelligentsia clubs have organized series of lectures about Judaism, Jewish-Polish history, and related subjects. An intense curiosity about the minority that once lived in Polish society is evident, and it

seems to reflect some deeper psychological processes. On the one hand, it may be a sentimental reaction against the grayness of the present in favor of a colorful and glorious past – with symbolic significance accorded to the independent Polish Republic of 1918 to 1939 – in which Jews turn out unexpectedly and paradoxically to be a *differentia specifica*. On the other hand, it is also an effort to understand the most complex events of the past with an awareness that only such understanding can make Polish society modern and free.

Lech Walesa's remarks, reported in *The New York Times*, at the April 18, 1988 commemoration of the forty-fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, affirmed Poland's recognition of its tradition of anti-Semitism in history as something to be accepted and atoned for and the simultaneous incorporation of Jewish history as a legitimate part of Polish history: "As a son of this land I ask today that we remember our troubled nation's common history and ask that everything that later poisoned it, especially the painful excesses of anti-Semitism, be forgiven us." Paying tribute to the Jewish resistance, he added, "We commemorate this struggle today in a special way, because in this land of so many uprisings, the uprising of the Jewish fighters was perhaps the most Polish of all uprisings."

Earlier at Warsaw Jewish Cemetery, several thousand Poles and Jews gathered to unveil a monument to prewar Jewish Bund leaders W. Alter and H. Erlich, who were executed in 1941 by Stalin after they (among other things) denounced the Soviet invasion of Eastern Poland in 1939. Dr. Marek Edelman, who was Deputy Commander of the Ghetto uprising, said that the monument was "a symbol of the shame of inhuman totalitarianism all over the world." That commemoration is symbolic in another way. It not only recognizes the common fate and history of the Polish Jews and Poles before the war, but it also shows that the Polish Republic, despite all its shortcomings, especially the irresponsible anti-Semitic policies of Polish nationalists after 1935, was a common, free homeland, destroyed by two totalitarian powers.

The whole discussion, now being conducted in a free Poland, is a painful but necessary testimony to what happened between the Poles and Jews in modern Polish history, especially in the inferno of the German occupation. It constitutes a token atonement that the Poles owe to Polish Jews and to their memory. It is the beginning of the collective acceptance of a simple, unspoken truth: that the Poles owe the Polish Jews, not enough mourned and wept over, a moral atonement at long last. Measured against the enormity of the Holocaust, this may not be enough, yet it is all that can be done at this late hour.

FICTION

Mary Alice Ayers

SLOW FLYING

I maneuver my flying machine, a Cessna 150 (simple bird, no omni, no radar) as if it were a boat.

The same precision is required when piloting over air as over water; I know because I have done both; unusual accomplishments perhaps for a young woman.

If we all killed ourselves that would solve the pollution problem. But there would be more waste after the deaths, as the bodies would have to decay (not everyone wants cremation.) How to solve this? How to eliminate all waste matter on the earth? One way is to fly, to leave the earth by taking our bodies up into the eternal firmament.

Because I can't reproduce myself I intend to destroy myself. This is what is thought by those who love me.

But I'm not a suicide pilot – I'm a believer, with a titanic faith. An inner voice assures me that I, though mortal, can be like an immortal angel if I can escape beyond the usual limits of this world. But, like an angel, I must have wings.

Under my wings now I am flying, seeking estrangement from earthly concerns, but I have been followed by my family. One thousand feet below me, my mother flies a Mooney Ranger (retractable landing gear, 168 mph cruising speed.) In this more sophisticated craft, she could catch me if she wanted to, but she doesn't want to. She wants to watch me.

To my left, I find my much older sister, shaky in a Piper Comanche (big 260 hp engine, cruising speed 185). She is too far away for me to read her face, but I can see her shoulders hunch in anticipation of my fall.

On my right, my brother practices slips (opposite aileron, opposite rudder) in a Beechcraft Bonanza, the ultimate prop plane in general aviation, with its constant speed, full feathering propeller, its 200 mph cruising speed. He will catch me if he can. But I can maneuver better than he, better than any of them, because I am the littlest of the lot. I am simple, an uncomplicated aircraft.

A living room, much like any other, with family seated about. An elderly woman; a middle-aged woman; a youngish man. "The trouble with my baby sister," the man says, "is that she can't accept reality."

A ritual cocktail hour is in progress. One swallow and the accusations

flow. The youngish man, who is talking about his baby sister, says next: “If she attempts it, she’ll fail for sure. She’s not a capable person.”

The elderly woman asks: “But is she sincere? Does she really want to kill herself?”

I’ve chosen a bad day for my solo. If the weather closes in I’ll be shut out of heaven through no fault of my own. (Faith can be carried too far, I’ve been told. But I don’t think that’s my problem.) There’s a thick cloud cover – a five thousand foot ceiling – that may lift or might lower. If it lowers I’m lost for I must go down; I have no instruments. My craft can’t see through clouds, which is contradictory I think, and sad, since clouds are what heaven is made of and I feel light as an angel. I do have an altimeter, which tells me how high I am, and a turn indicator, which shows how steeply I am banking, and of course gauges for readings of airspeed, rpm’s, gas and fuel consumption. But nothing for what is called an instrument situation, for blind flying in clouds.

Even when they most deny it, younger people know that experience teaches best, and they look to older adults for counsel. In the living room, where a family has gathered, the elderly woman says: “We should have advised marriage but that wasn’t taking the long view, and it was the long view that was wanted.”

The younger man looks exceedingly mournful, and fatuous besides, like a depressed beagle hound. “No,” he says, “we didn’t want her to be pressured into anything. Later she would have tried to escape.”

The middle-aged woman says: “But she’s trying to escape now. Our plan backfired.”

Sky puffy like a comforter. If it could be thrown off it would reveal a blue sheet on which I could lie and at last be able to sleep.

On overcast mornings, like this one, my mother says the sky will clear if there’s enough blue in it to make a sailor’s suit. Not only do I not know if she is right about this, but I don’t know what she means by “enough.” How big was the sailor whose suit appears in the sky – size is relative. Was he as fat as the sun, or as tall as a rainbow – or merely lifesize . . . Terms must be more definite, if a parent is to be understood by a child.

My brother, in his Beechcraft Bonanza, is doing S turns over a road. He hates wasting time even when there’s a life at stake. The tragedy in general aviation today lies in our inability to communicate, one plane to another. We can talk to the ground-bound, to the controllers, but not to the air-borne, to the pilots. But if I could talk to those close to me, what would I tell them? That I can’t reproduce myself . . . they know this. And whose fault it is that I can’t they know too.

However, they needn't fear. I can't kill myself because there is no way I can fall. A navy pilot explained basic aerodynamics to me. Air is matter, and has density and weight. I am flying because my engine creates a vacuum over the wing. Nature abhors a vacuum. Essentially, the plane rises to fill the hole in the sky. The hole has no color, like the blue in the sailor's suit my mother speaks of, but it is very much there. I am caught up in this hole as certainly as I might be caught up in a child's swing – the only way I can fall from it is if the engine stops. And I'm not going to stop the engine because it's taking me to heaven, to be with the angels who were born flyers, not like myself who has had to learn from scratch.

In the living room. Later. The dish holding cheese and crackers has been emptied. There is a look of satiety in the group, but not of peace. The elderly woman says: "It is an educational process totally. One must learn to accept responsibility for one's mistakes – not to walk away from them. Or to pretend they weren't made. Or worse yet, to blame someone else for them."

The younger man says: "Yes. And she should have asked him to help make the decision. Imagine keeping the other party completely in the dark."

In the dark. The room they discourse in is getting dark. It is dark outside, but the blinds are still open and they don't turn on a light. They are lost in thought, in a process casually called "second guessing."

Flying, like tender sex, is done with the tips of the fingers. But for every touch there is a definite response, usually a positive one. Push forward on the wheel, and the nose goes down. Pull back and the nose comes up. When the nose comes up, the plane climbs. Down, it falls.

To lie down is to die in a way, if the lying down involves surrender to another person.

A doctor said: "Any woman who conceives out of wedlock does so from deliberate self-destruction."

A woman can get over being self-destructive I've been told. Eighteen is not forever. Self-destructiveness is a curable disease, like measles, not an incurable one, like cancer.

If I destroy myself finally and totally I won't have to bother any more with silly questions like these. What is worth asking – We know a fetus is as much waste as fecal matter. We know this. What is worth asking – is there a cause and effect between what was and what is. Inability to reproduce cannot definitely be linked to anything, not definitely, not certainly.

Everyone who was in the living room has left it and has gone into the dining room and they are eating there, at a cherrywood table, highly varnished. In it, they can see their faces; their expressions are strained. The

younger man says: "We aren't responsible really; we advised and she took our advice. She never told him because she thought if she did she would lose him. Just like that. If forced to marriage, he would run, she said. She was insecure."

The middle-aged woman says: "She's a dreamer. It's always been difficult to bring her down to earth."

Whoever wants me to survive must live my life for me. I can't. Because taking another's life threatens the loss of one's own – puts the essential self at risk.

A piece of blue has appeared in the great expanse of white above me at five thousand feet, and I soar towards it. Is it enough blue to make a sailor's suit? On full power (2,400 rpm's), nose up, I fly, lighter than air because I am now filled with hope. The blue is a sign from above. I will be so quickly through the blue that those who follow will lose me to the eternal sky, elsewhere all covering cloud, puffy and white, a comforter on which I might sleep forever.

The youngish man who is eating his dinner, concentrating on the essentials, as usual, says about me, "The trouble with her is that she lives only in her imagination. She's dead otherwise to the basic realities."

"Yes," says the middle-aged woman. "She has a fantastic imagination."

But what we imagine is the only real. The mind speaks the truth. And the truth to my mind is the sailor who wears the blue suit. He's gone through the sky before me, and is in heaven with the unborn. I will find him and then – The other planes have remained below the cloud-comforter, probably confused and embarrassed, mostly embarrassed, because they no longer can see me and lack the courage to try.

Katherine Janowitz

APÁM (MY FATHER)

He says I give him angina. I hurt his heart. "My hear hurts."
This is appropriate. I hurt his heart. He hurt my heart.

Hungarians are metaphysical poets of the heart and Hungarian is one
of my father's mother tongues.

Életem – my life. *Szívem* – my heart.

His latest project – the showerhead lamp. Pick it up – little holes on the
bottom of the base. They gave us killing gas. I give you the fruits of Israel.
Light and water through my house, Daddy. Light and water through my
house.

He wants to kill me. I want to kill him back. I am his German. He is
mine.

My husband tells me I am always looking for the key and this is a
mistake. But I'm the locksmith's daughter, metal shavings all over our house.

We are complex, subterranean. We speak too many languages.

I am my mother's daughter and my mother's son. I am my father's
daughter and my father's son.

He was a soldier. He was small but strong. He wanted to fight but
they told him not to fight.

"We loved our country."

I am only a girl, Daddy, and not good with guns.

My mother died and left him to me.

I go to the movies and see naked men swimming in the greengold of
England.

He needs bridgework. He has cataracts, sciatica, and Parkinson's, the
shaking sickness.

"I never heard of such a sickness. This sickness is American."

I take him to the dentist. His name is Greenwald. My father thinks it is
a good name, thinks his work is good. But then he thinks the dentist is a liar
and his nurse is a thief.

His language is and is not my language. My language is not his.

His is the genius of permanent exile. House and no house. Love and
no love. Uprooted.

Trust no one. I trust no one.

I am Pip, your boy, your gentleman. You shake me till I rattle. You
bend me back.

I bring him cake. Nothing tastes like his mother's cake. Too sweet, not
sweet enough. American.

I never wear dresses. I never meet his eyes.

Nothing is expendable. In this the Germans were stupid beyond belief.

I wear brown and gray for half the year. The other half I am an
American rose.

We put down roots. We move forward into the future.

Pull me into it. Pull me back.

My beast is dying. I see his shape in the mirror. I bare my breasts. I come back.

No priests, no rabbis. He carves his totem – bird and leaning man. I am your soldier, your comrade-at-arms. We fight the enemy together. We win.

When I was small, he wrote my name in his *szép írás*, his beautiful writing, and that was my name.

I am his mother and his sisters. I am all the women in the garden.

A dream – I am standing in the garden feeding the birds.

I am your bird. I come back to your dovecote, to your cupped hand.

He looks at me. My face is wrong, my name is not my name.

“My sister Katitza was squell.” Swell, Daddy, swell.

I am a bird swaying on my soft belly.

My survivor is dying. Attention must be paid.

My mother left home and she couldn’t go back.

Sometimes you lose yourself. Sometimes you stay between two worlds.

The lights go on and off and the thieves come and take what you have.

We never found our house again, only rooms.

Listen to my mother’s story. A boy falls in love with a girl and the girl tells him that as proof of his love he must kill his mother and cut out her heart. He does as she asks, but as he is carrying the heart back to the girl, he trips and falls and the heart cries out to him, “Son, are you hurt?”

Szívem.

Listen. A Hungarian freedom fighter returning from America after thirty years remembers the fighting – “There was much confusion but it was a sweet confusion.”

I am Pál, your pal, your boy apprentice. I keep your secrets, I follow your rules.

I see that you are on a silver plane. I see that I have to get off.

Other people suffer.

I talk too much. He puts up his hands. My talk kills. When I was small, he cut out my tongue but it grew back.

“You should have this Parkinson’s, this shaking.”

I have it. I caught it from you.

He tells the doctor he can control the shaking. He says his leg was already shaking by the time he was fifteen. The doctor asks me if my father ate chick peas in concentration camp because chick peas can produce Parkinson’s symptoms. But my father was in labor camp before they went into hiding.

“Jews were in charge. They had good Jewish food.”

My father tells me I should drink a glass of water half full and I do it

but he says I did it wrong because the glass is half empty.

I would like to let you go. I would like to desert you.

Old wolf, old fox, autumn is here. The hunters are coming.

"They chased us like animals."

We move too fast for them. We keep one step ahead.

I think you like this game.

"I have pain because of you."

No, I have pain because of you.

Now I put you in my book, Daddy. Now I write you down. Words are nails, Daddy. I transpose you.

"I would like to murder someone. Just to murder someone."

Yes, I know.

I learned speed from you but now you are slow and jealous of me.

We sit in a circle of light. Elegy and idyll. It all comes back.

Pinocchio, your wooden boy. How to escape you.

I am talking about you. I am telling your secrets. Forgive me.

Last week I lost a set of keys to his apartment and then a few days later, when he was in the hospital, I locked myself out of his apartment and had to hire a locksmith to let me in (this gave me a secret pleasure). And I lost this notebook which I rewrote and at the end of the week a pair of pants I took home to wash for him, but those I eventually found. I also broke my glasses.

Do you see now?

I am not your child, Daddy. Books are my fathers. Listen to Siefert, the old Czech poet, the lover of Prague, of Jews, of women. Listen to Capek, who writes about gardens.

When I was small, I was the Amazon Queen. I read so fast I left you behind.

"It's no good to be old."

What will you leave me?

I would like to divorce you.

"I have only you, only you."

Build me a house, Daddy. Make me a garden. We still have time.

I dream a fire is coming across the garden and my husband tells me we have to get out and my daughter tells me we have to get out but I can't find my glasses.

"When they took away my mother's garden she said it was the same as if they had cut off her hand."

I will make you *palacsinta* stuffed with apricots.

When I was small we had a Christmas tree and I was the Christ child and I was the angel.

See him clearly. Does he hurt you?

Yes. He screams at me. He raises his fist. He wants me to be dead.

He wants me to tear myself up like a bad poem.

I am a bad poem. No one can look at me.

I keep myself like a dog on a leash. I keep myself tame.

Someday we will all be together in a blossoming orchard.

Do you believe me? Old Lear and his fool.

Climb up on my lap. Let me tell you stories.

Let me sing to you, David to Saul.

I choose to go with you. I choose to say.

Dies ist mein Tagbuch. This is my Book of Hours.

"I feel like there would be ants crawling on my feet."

Spring is coming.

Hold a mirror to my mouth. Do you see my breath?

I am gifted, Daddy.

Sometimes it's like a waking dream.

I killed my mother. I went to college and she died. I slept with boys and she died.

I would like to be an engineer. I would like to be a citizen of the world.

I am still afraid of you.

I am conscripted. I am used up in your service. I am American.

A rocketship and the faces at the window are the faces you know and it takes off into the future.

Every thread rewoven.

Am I a good mother?

Let me wrap you in fine raiment.

Kundera tells us. We go home to die.

He was no rabbi and he was no tailor. He made guns.

When his cat got sick, at first he was angry and he said "Get that cat out of here" but then he let him sleep on his bed.

"My father cut himself and he was bleeding very badly."

Szívem.

Életem.

I am the country where you live.

I am the angel of love.

There is a book for every need or if not you can write one.

To his brother in Prague:

Thank you for the last letter of yours. I am feeling sometimes better and sometimes worse. I still hope that I am going to feel better in the warmer days.

You are my honors paper, Daddy.

Boswell and Johnson.

The old king dying.

Rain.

Jeffrey Herf

RELIVING THE SIXTIES

The new left and the “sixties” has become an academic topic. In the process, the underlying sentiments of sixties radicalism have not vanished, though the expression of those sentiments has been modulated. In place of “off the pig,” “blow your mind,” and “smash Amerika”[sic], have come Foucault, deconstruction, and post-Marxism. In the process, the texture of the years can get lost in theoretical pretention or sentimentalism. The virtue of the three books on the sixties discussed here lies in bringing back the texts and words of the time without relying heavily on the theoretical filters of the present. They also tell us something about what those broadly sympathetic to the political mood of the sixties have and have not learned.

Maurice Isserman’s *If I Had a Hammer*¹ seeks the historical roots of the sixties new left in the remnants of the old left. While it will not come as news to readers of *Partisan Review*, Isserman argues a too often neglected point:

Not only were the ‘dark ages’ of the 1950s less dark and static than I had supposed, but the ‘renaissance’ of the 1960s . . . was also ‘less bright and less sudden’ than I had previously supposed. . . . Historians are naturally attracted to periods in which the movements they study are at the peak of their influence (take, for example, the research into the Communist Party’s history during the Second World War); but there is much more to be learned by studying these movements at their nadir. In defeat, the partisans of a political movement may reveal aspects of their thought, as well as capacities for reflection and change, that would have remained obscured in more propitious times.

Isserman examines the political reflections of the defeated left of the 1930s and 1940s during the 1950s, of ex-Communists, Schachtmanites, the editors of *Dissent*, and radical pacifists who “provided a political language” with which the sixties left could “make sense of their own discontents and desires.” He discusses the failed efforts of dissidents in the Communist Party to take over the Party after Khrushchev’s secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress. Two years after the Khrushchev speech, Party membership had shrunk to five thousand. Isserman estimates the total number of all excommunists in the United States in the mid-1950s as in the hundreds of thousands. This “party of excommunists,” he believes, “were the most influential adult radical group in the 1960s,” providing a personal bond and an

¹ *If I Had a Hammer . . . The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left*. By Maurice Isserman. Basic Books. \$18.95.

institutional memory that linked the political generations of the old and new left.

Isserman chronicles the history of the Schachmanites, a dreary tale of self-important and self-deluded sectarians, and of Michael Harrington's zeal in breathing life into the Young Socialist League and the Young People's Socialist League on college campuses. These small groups conserved ideas that were to find a broader reception in the 1960s. A Socialist Party emerged from the debris, and efforts to find a common home for democratic socialists and ex-communists, the Khrushchev speech ringing in their ears, began. Isserman accepts *Dissent's* "self-understanding" as stubbornly resistant to changes in political fashion, especially the "capitulation of American intellectuals to McCarthyism," meaning the stance of *Commentary*, *Encounter*, and *Partisan Review*, but he presents no extended discussion of the debate or of the emergence of opposition to Communism in the 1950s from these three journals. Irving Howe and Stanley Plastrik, editors of *Dissent*, "stopped well short of the hard anticommunism" of *Commentary* and *Partisan Review*. They rejected a "third camp" position between East and West in favor of what Isserman calls a "second and a half camp." That is, though they supported American foreign policy in general, they opposed it in specific instances. Lewis Coser was more blunt. "The least a radical can do in these years of the locusts is to try not to be a dupe," and to grasp the imperialist nature of both the United States and the Soviet Union, an early expression of what became a more widespread stance of a plague on both houses in recent years.

Isserman presents the often-told tale of the confrontation between the "soft" anticommunism of Irving Howe and the editors of *Dissent* and the anti-anticommunism of the new left in the early sixties. Isserman takes the side of the new left, seeing Howe and Coser's anticommunism as due to residual arguments with "their 1930s contemporaries rather than with the generation of young radicals." This is why, he argues, the editors of *Dissent*, with their message of "tired heroism" and soft anticommunism, lost their opportunity to reach a broader audience of the young left, as it grew in confidence and numbers during the great university expansion of the 1960s. He is surely right about this. A chapter on radical pacifism, a rather neglected current of the new left, underscores Isserman's point that the words and actions of small numbers of people in the 1950s, in this case those expressing a religious moralism, contributed to a spirit and mood that became more pervasive in the sixties. In his treatment of the fifties, Isserman recovers aspects of leftist ferment that have received less discussion than have the analyses by liberal intellectuals of totalitarianism, the end of ideology, mass culture, and the Cold War.

Yet despite the abundance of organizational activity and thinking that Isserman sees in the 1950s, the basic story remains one of discontinuity.

Without a sense of the old left's history, the new left came to recapitulate some of the worst excesses of its predecessors. Mired in the old arguments of the 1930s, the older generation of the new left – Howe, Walzer, Harrington – clashed with Tom Hayden and others. What then should the new left have learned from the old left?

... the need for a patient, long-term approach to building movements; an emphasis upon the value of winning small victories as part of a strategy preparing the way for larger ones; a willingness to work with others with differing viewpoints around limited goals; a commitment to internal political education; an understanding of the need for a representative organizational structure that holds leaders responsible to their own constituents rather than to the priorities established by the media; an appreciation of the value and fragility of civil liberties; and a sense of historical irony that would allow its adherents to keep both victories and defeats in perspective. As its inheritance from the Old Left, the New Left took to heart those lessons that in the short run allowed it to grow spectacularly, but not the lessons that in the long run might have allowed it to survive fruitfully.

If one confines the term *new left* to Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), then Isserman's conclusion is a commonplace. SDS did grow quickly and easily and self-destructed even more rapidly. The restriction is surely too narrow. The Institute for Policy Studies, the Jesse Jackson campaign, and the Rainbow Coalition are good examples of just the kind of strategy Isserman says the new left failed to learn.

In *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey through 1968*,² David Caute presents a revolutionary calendar of what he calls "the most turbulent [year] since the end of World War II." The tour stops in Belgium, the United States, Britain, France, West Germany, Spain, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Mexico, and Japan, with special visits to Columbia University, the Free University in Berlin, the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and with the American organization Black Power. Everything is here: the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, a quotation or two from Eldridge Cleaver, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Allen Ginsberg, and the more exotic ventures to Prague and Tokyo.

The tone echoes the spirit of those times. The war in Vietnam was "worse than a blunder, it was a crime." The "innovative ideas of the new left – frequently, thought not invariably, expressed with clarity and sophistication – constitute a treasury whose present dilapidation impoverishes us." Caute recovers many slogans and quotations from the counterculture as well as the new left's vision of "a world undivided by race, class or gender." The

² *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey through 1968*. By David Caute. Harper and Row. \$24.95.

“nuclear issue” drew attention to “the irrationality of advanced technocratic systems committed to rational social engineering.” The new left’s “grassroots counter-institutions . . . challenge the bureaucratic structures of official society” and “endow common people with an awakening sense of their own identity.”

Caute recalls some perhaps forgotten events of the year, such as a two-week Havana Cultural Congress in January 1968 which attracted some four hundred intellectuals from Latin America, Europe, and the United States. He brings forth the documents of the *East Village Other*, the Free School of New York, and Liberation News Service; recounts the major speakers and events of student protests in Spain, France, Britain, and West Germany; contrasts the earnest yearning for democracy and civil liberties in Eastern Europe with the countercultural assaults on one-dimensional society in the West. There are short chapters on American draft resistance and black power, the Democratic convention in Chicago, May ’68 in Paris, the turmoil in the West German, British, and Spanish universities, radical theater, the Prague Spring, the beginnings of feminism. Yet at the end of the year, the “distinctive challenge of 1968 to the State, the political system and corporate capitalism was defeated.” Culture had undergone change, but it too became incorporated:

Many wires got crossed, with hip tycoons everywhere. We may expect a professedly gay heavyweight champion of the world. Rock music still hypnotizes the young and ‘top of the charts’ is top of the world. Capitalist culture became more eclectic: the ideal TV talk show confronts Miss America with a militant feminist and then has the former reveal she’s a ‘feminist,’ too. So that’s all right. This constant cultural neutering of dissent, the eclecticism which treats all ideas as short-lived merchandise, has reinforced the triumph of the profit motive and the idolization of market forces in the era of Reagan and Thatcher.

The spirit of Marcuse lives on in Caute’s account. The society without opposition made dissent into fun and profit. But there is just too much in this book, treated too superficially. It is an informative travelogue.

David Farber’s *Chicago 68*³ is a book about the “public feelings” of the forces contending in the streets during the Chicago Democratic Convention: countercultural Yippies, ‘serious’ political leftists in the National Coordinating Committee working to end the war in Vietnam, or the Mobilization (Mobe), as it was known, on one side, facing Mayor Daley and the Chicago police on the other. Farber writes that the conflict was “fueled by the completely different

³ *Chicago 68*. By David Farber. The University of Chicago Press. \$19.95.

conceptions of political practice and social order the main actors brought to the planning and realization of the convention." He offers us "three separate stories, all of which climax at the convention" to assess the motives, premises and beliefs of the main actors. In his less deconstructed and more empathetic introduction, Farber promises "narratives unadorned by the historian's authorial voice."

Abby Hoffmann, Ed Krassner, Ed Sanders, and Jerry Rubin announced the birth of the Youth International Party on January 16, 1968:

The life of the American spirit is being torn asunder by the forces of violence, decay, and the napalm cancer fiend. We demand the politics of ecstasy. We are the delicate spoors of the new fierceness that will change America. We will create our own reality, we are Free America. And we will not accept the false theater of the Death Convention. We will be in Chicago. Begin preparations. Now. Chicago is yours. Do it!

And preparations indeed did begin. Farber presents their manifestoes, their infighting, their conflicts with the "serious" political leftists of Mobe, and discusses their understanding of how to use television to amplify the message.

The Yippies, while skillfully learning to use the media, said, "There are no spokesmen for the Yippies." They "made no demands" of the Democrats and Republicans, other than that they "cease to exist." They did demand legalization of marijuana, an end to all forms of imperialism and money, full unemployment, open and free use of the media, and an eighteenth demand left blank "so you can fill in what you want." And, of course, they added, "Be realistic – demand the impossible."

The "serious" left of 1968 – SDS, Mobe, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, and David Dellinger appear as well. They spoke in more conventional terms of putting pressure on the American government to stop the war by a demonstration in Chicago. Many people worked very hard to bring many more people to Chicago. What about SDS, the revolutionary vanguard of the decade? The SDS national office thought the convention protest was too close to the [Eugene] McCarthyites, "too open to the possibility of liberal co-optation . . . at the spring convention, June 10-14 [1968], in East Lansing, Michigan, the Chicago protest was ignored." SDS leaders were too busy becoming "revolutionary communists" to bother about a coalition with such muddle-heads as were planning the convention protest. Tom Hayden, however, rejected such radical purism and fear of mass action. "We are coming to Chicago to vomit on the 'politics of joy' [espoused by Hubert Humphrey], to expose the secret decisions, upset the night-club orgies, and face the Democratic Party with its illegitimacy and criminality. . . . The government of the United States is an outlaw institution under the control of war criminals."

Farber then discusses Mayor Daley and his police department, and points out that Mayor Daley did not agree with Tom Hayden about war criminals and the illegitimacy of the Democratic Party. The Mayor, who may not have been the nicest man, was not a stupid one. At a news conference before the convention, he said:

We are talking to the hippies, the Yippies, and the flippies and everything else . . . We are talking to the newspapers and some of them are hippies and Yippies. And to the TV and radio, and a lot of them, I guess, are leaders in these movements.

The Yippies and Mobe were successful in “freaking out” the Mayor and the police. Rumors abounded of dynamite under gas lines, poison in hotel food, LSD in the city’s water supply, mortar attacks on the convention, cut power lines, and even assassinations of political leaders. The protesters provoked, cajoled, heckled, and ridiculed the forces of order, and succeeded in getting the police to lose their cool, to riot, smash heads indiscriminately, including some established and middle-aged heads, and some placed in front of television cameras. The Yippie and Mobe strategy of Hayden and Davis proved to be successful beyond anyone’s wildest imagination, illustrating how minorities could use the media to enormous political effect. It is a lesson that passed into the commonplaces of radical politics. Though Farber doesn’t draw this point out, his study of “perception” is also a study in impression management, and here the few scored a big victory.

The Yippies understood, at a level of sophistication adequate to the task, the political importance of mass culture and television. They also understood the political importance of drugs. Here is Jerry Rubin in 1968:

Marijuana makes each person God . . . Marijuana is destroying the schools. Education is conditioning. Pot deconditions. School makes us cynics. Pot makes us dreamers. Education polarizes our brains into subjects, categories, division, concepts. Pot scrambles our brains and presents everything as a perfect mess . . . Marijuana is a truth serum . . . “Why die on Hamburger Hill?” asks the pot-smoking Amerikan [*sic*] soldier, as he points his gun at the Captain who orders him to take a hill only the Viet Kong want?

John Sinclair, a musician from Detroit, praised LSD for bringing “everything into focus for the first time in our lives . . . Until we started eating all that acid we couldn’t figure out what was happening – we knew things were all wrong the way they were but we didn’t know how they could be different . . . LSD cleared all that up.” It sure did.

A decade later, when Tom Hayden was asked to reconsider what he did in 1968, he said, "The things you have to do to be heard in a closed society will make you seem preposterous, crazy and subject you to all kinds of labels." A "closed society"? Farber lets the remark pass without comment, despite the fact that his book indicates how open, free, and vulnerable the technocratic imperialist beast was.

Farber's conclusion returns to the theme of pragmatic politicians and voters confronting ideologues. "The battles of the 1960s . . . revolved around the question of how to define the relationship of ideology and pragmatic considerations." Farber evokes sympathy for those seeking "free spaces from which to build political consciousness," faced with the "imperfect reality of community men like Mayor Daley" and the "simulated world of technocratic internationalism they had been raised to manage." Where much literature on the 1960s suffers from self-importance and pretentiousness, Farber has done us the service of digging into the real spirit of the times. Yet in places where he departs from a restrained authorial voice, he accepts the language of the decade, its easy evocation of free spaces in a "closed society," of the idealistic young gone wrong in rage against technocratic internationalism.

What seems hardest to grasp for the authors of these three very different books is that the movements of 1968 had their successes as well as their failures. The demonstrations at the Democratic Convention made huge contributions to dividing the Democratic Party, facilitating Hubert Humphrey's defeat and Richard Nixon's election. The movements in the streets, though a numerical minority, considerably raised the cost of pursuing the war, and became an important front in the battle against American involvement in Vietnam. Rubin, Hoffman, and their comrades were successful in introducing and legitimizing the use of drugs, especially marijuana, hashish, and LSD, in the middle class. And from Bob Dylan's turn to the electric guitar in Newport in 1965 to Abby Hoffman's manipulation of television in Chicago in 1968, the countercultural left played a vanguard role in exploiting technology to reach an expanded audience.

In 1968 people who thought that taking LSD was a good thing, that America was a closed society, who either thought a Communist victory was desirable in Vietnam or didn't think through what its consequences would be, received great press and media attention in Western Europe, Japan, and the United States. As Cauter's travelogue reminds us, in all of the open, free Western democracies, intellectuals and activists of the left were successful in raising the cost to the American government of staying in Vietnam. Though each of these three books takes ideas of the sixties seriously, all underestimate the political weight of the new left and antiwar movements in this regard.

Bureaucracies can be impersonal, governments unresponsive, and

prosperity can be empty of meaning and purpose. But take away the war in Vietnam and the spring 1968 Tet offensive, and you take away the central focus of 1968 and the cause of the left's rapid expansion. If the movements discussed in these works had been only failures, South Vietnam today might be on its way to democracy and prosperity, a country as closed as South Korea during the Seoul Olympics, instead of being the truly closed and impoverished dictatorship it is today, and the Khemer Rouge would never have perpetuated an Asian Auschwitz. The 1968ers wanted American power out of Indochina. The United States did get out. The Communists did win. And the people of Indochina suffered. This catastrophe is what some of the generation of 1968 and its chroniclers are still reluctant to discuss.

Coming in

Partisan Review:

- Andrei Sinyavsky on Russophobia
- Julia Kristeva on the French Revolution
- Helen Frankenthaler: *Thoughts from an Occasional Journal*
- William Phillips: *The Function of Criticism Today*
- A. B. Yehoshua: *The Israeli Novel*
- Philippe Raynaud: *Feminism and the Ancien Régime*
- Barbara Probst Solomon: *Harold Brodkey on Love*
- Peter Loewenberg: *The Uses of Anxiety*
- Nathan Glazer on Life in the Bronx
- Clancy Sigal: *Second Thoughts*
- Anthony Kerrigan: *A Nicaraguan Story*
- Jorge Edwards on Contemporary Chilean Writing
- Herbert Gold: *A Blazing Inquest*

Louis Menand

A WILDE FOR OUR TIME

Does Oscar Wilde matter? Oscar Wilde thought so, and in his prison letter, *De Profundis*, he provided posterity with this account of his importance:

I made art a philosophy, and philosophy an art: I altered the minds of men and the colors of things: there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder: I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or the sonnet, at the same time that I widened its range and enriched its characterization: drama, novel, poem in rhyme, poem in prose, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty: to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated Art as the supreme reality, and life as a mere mode of fiction: I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me: I summed up all systems in a phrase, and all existence in an epigram.

The extravagance, of course, is characteristic; extravagance was one of Wilde's favorite comic devices. But *De Profundis* is not a comedy, and that Wilde was incapable of modifying his self-regard even in an apologia is one of the reasons many people have found it easy not to take him completely seriously. In his moment of direst deprivation, he still could not resist gilding his lilies.

The chart of Wilde's reputation shows a spectacular ascendancy, an equally spectacular peripeteia, a long period of probation, and, since the 1960s, a significant but equivocal rehabilitation. His stature today is troubled in several ways. In the general culture, Wilde has always represented the supreme poseur. That his manner was pure and deliberate affectation was the satirical charge of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* (1881): "Then let me own," confesses the aesthete Bunthorne to the audience in a private moment, "I'm an aesthetic sham." Gilbert probably had Rossetti or Pater (or both) in mind when he created Bunthorne, and when the role was first played, the actor, George Grossmith, was made up to look like Whistler. But audiences immediately identified the character with Wilde, and have done so ever since.

The Bunthorne figure has two associations: he is a familiar caricature of the avant-garde artist who wins wealth and fame by cynically mocking and inverting conventional values; and he fits a common stereotype of male

homosexuality. As he had to, Gilbert played this second aspect of the character coyly. (There was nothing homosexual about Rossetti, but Pater's homosexuality was well-rumored.) Although the plot of *Patience* revolves around Bunthorne's astonishing ability to attract women, at the opera's end, after everyone else has been paired off, he remains single, forced to content himself with "a tulip or lily" – or, as Gilbert has it elsewhere, "a vegetable love."

In the 1960s, these associations stopped being invidious in the way they once were, and Wilde profited from the change in climate. The avant-gardist today is invited to tweak the nose of established opinion; he may sometimes, if he likes, punch it. If the insult is judged provocative enough, or amusing enough, few people begrudge him the rewards he collects from the society whose values he has sneered at. Those rewards are now considered society's way of winning the game. And the kind of amoral aestheticism that is often associated with Wilde and with male homosexuality has come to be regarded as a fresh and even a liberating attitude. Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp" (1964) was that attitude's manifesto: "The two pioneering forces of modern sensibility," she explained, "are Jewish moral seriousness and homosexual aestheticism and irony. . . . The Jews pinned their hopes for integrating into modern society on promoting the moral sense. Homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense. Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness." Oscar Wilde is the hero of "Notes on Camp."

Still, there is something unsatisfactory about regarding Wilde as the precursor of distinctively late twentieth-century cultural styles. For one thing, it effectively reduces his stature: next to a mocker and camper like Andy Warhol, Wilde looks like a mere beginner. And it misses a quality of Wilde's character that distinguishes him as decisively from Warhol in our century as it did from Whistler (and Bunthorne) in his. For although he had a sense of irony as complete as any Pop artist's, and a passion for celebrity as intense as any social climber's, Wilde was not a cynic. He truly believed what he wrote in *De Profundis* about awakening the imagination of his century – which is why he was truly shattered when it was brought forcibly home to him that his century was happy to slumber on without him.

Wilde's recovery as a popular figure in the general culture has not quite been matched in the academic culture. The academic literary historian likes a clear genealogy of influence – Arnold is followed by Pater, who is followed in turn by T.S. Eliot – and the problem with Wilde is knowing where to place him. Is he a late Victorian exotic, huddled under the wing of Pater? Or is he a pioneer of sensibility, priming the culture for modernism? "Finding himself overshadowed by old famous men he could not attack, for he was of their time and shared its admirations," wrote Yeats in 1936, Wilde "tricked and clowned to draw attention to himself." Yeats had a genuine, if sometimes

condescending, affection for Wilde, and there is enough truth in his remark to make it clear why Wilde does not rank as a modernist. For all his insouciance, Wilde could never bring himself to renounce the past. Though anti-Philistine, his taste (like his prose) was Victorian. In conversation he was capable, as with the famous remark about the death of Dickens's Little Nell, of memorable put-downs; but in his published writings he rarely criticized, and often praised with conventional praise-words, the accepted literary greats of his century. There was much that Wilde hated about British culture, but it was a kind of hatred he shared with Carlyle, Arnold, and Ruskin rather than with Lawrence, Eliot, and Joyce.

On the other hand, no one would mistake Wilde for a sage, and the deftness with which he ran intellectual circles around the earnest moralisms of his fellow Victorians makes him seem distinctly modern. Wilde's thought has a streak of radical nominalism in it which sets him apart not only from conventional Victorian morality but from Victorian literature generally – a streak that once led Thomas Mann to compare Wilde (a little reluctantly, for the resemblance seems to have surprised Mann himself) with Nietzsche.

* * *

The object of Richard Ellmann's recent biography of Wilde,* put very simply, is the complete rehabilitation of Wilde as an important figure in the history of our culture. Its strategy for reaching this goal is to downplay whatever evidence there is that sustains the Bunthorne persona (in both its negative and positive editions), and to reconcile Wilde's Victorianism with his modernity. There is more to *Oscar Wilde* than this, of course. Wilde is one of the small number of writers whose lives make consistently dramatic stories, and the sureness and intelligence with which Ellmann moves, at just the right pace, through familiar and unfamiliar episodes in Wilde's life have been justly praised by most of the book's reviewers. The legendary undergraduate career at Oxford, the wildly publicized tour of America, the fantastically expanding bubble of fame, its sudden bursting, the final years adrift on the Continent – Ellmann gives each chapter a thorough telling. There is a fated quality about Wilde's rise and fall that gives the life a literary shape – the shape, for instance, of a story by Wilde's favorite novelist, Balzac. Ellmann manages to evoke that shape without letting it interfere with the freedom of his own narration.

Still, this is not a book about British culture of the late nineteenth century and Wilde's place in it. It is a portrait of Wilde. Ellmann, sadly, suffered from a degenerative illness in the last years of his life; he died shortly after the book went to press. It may be that he had planned to fill in more of the

* *Oscar Wilde*. By Richard Ellmann. Alfred A. Knopf. \$24.95.

context of Wilde's career but was prevented from doing so by a natural desire to complete the book (which he had worked on for twenty years) as expeditiously as he could. Whether this is so or not, as the story moves into the strange and heady culture of the early 1890s, one begins to feel a thinness in the narrative. Beardsley, Symons, *The Yellow Book* – they are all duly mentioned, but they remain vague sketches in the background of the picture of Wilde. The effect is to put the question of whether Wilde matters to us as a figure who can stand on his own – in the way, for example, that Dickens and Joyce seem to matter to us – in the foreground of the book. The question is certainly worth posing, even if we should conclude that Wilde in fact does not quite matter to us in that sense. It would have been easy enough to have demonstrated Wilde's importance to his own time and left the larger issue in abeyance. Ellmann's book, by design or otherwise, presents us with a more difficult challenge.

Ellmann addresses the problem of Wilde's relation to his own century in this way: "His language," he writes, "is his finest achievement. . . . It takes what has been ponderously said and remakes it according to a new perspective and a new principle. An older generation's reassuring platitudes and tired certainties are suddenly infused with youthful intransigence, a sort of pontifical impudence that commands attention. We have the pleasure of affirming the *ancien régime* and of rebelling against it at the same time. Long live the king, we say, as we cut off his head." The part about language seems, as a general statement about Wilde's work, ill-judged: surely, whatever else it is, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an extremely badly written novel. But the phrase "pontifical impudence" rings true, and so does the general sentiment. Ellmann's assessment echoes Yeats's – that Wilde found himself in the shadow of older writers he could not repudiate – but it recognizes, as Yeats's does not, the degree to which Wilde was coolly conscious of his predicament and, rather than ducking it, put it to use.

This analysis of Wilde's place in nineteenth-century culture is a model for what is finest and truest in Ellmann's portrait. The popular image of Wilde obscures many things about him, and one is that he was an exceptionally smart man. He knew what he was doing even when he was doing things he knew he would regret. More than this, he had a genuine intellectual comprehension of his century and its values. He chose too often to express this comprehension in witticisms that can be easily snipped from their contexts and converted into outrageous and one-dimensional slogans; but it is a mistake to think he was merely clever, or that his cleverness was shallow. When Ellmann proposes that "Wilde is one of us," it is this remarkable acuity of Wilde's that makes him seem right. Unlike Arnold or Carlyle or Ruskin, Wilde seems to have understood the nineteenth century in terms very close to the way we understand it today. He saw where its naturalism cut against its romanticism, where its scientific view of the world cut against its moral

faith, the extent to which “what everyone says” in late Victorian society was the opposite of “what everyone does” – and he knew what in those incongruities was peculiar to his time and what was peculiar to the human condition. Wilde cannot be called a modernist writer, but he had a modernist intellect.

Why is it, then, that when Ellmann writes, “Wilde was a moralist, in a school where Blake, Nietzsche, and even Freud were his fellows,” we feel he has reached too far? The claim forces us to separate our sense of the intellect from our sense of the work. Wilde the man is a figure deduced from many clues – from the testimony left by those who knew him or heard him speak (Ellmann prints a transcription of one of Wilde’s lectures made by someone in the audience who used a set of diacritical symbols to indicate Wilde’s unusual inflections); from what has been recorded of his celebrated table talk (including the lambent, oblique parables and “tales of the early Church” he sometimes invented); from his letters. By these accounts, Wilde was a man of extraordinary character. Although he could be offensively supercilious and vain, he was most of the time generous, good-natured, emotional, ingratiating, self-confident. He had a large view of his world, its limits and its possibilities; and his moral sense was subtle, unconventional, and (with a few very striking exceptions) usually right.

But these aren’t qualities we associate automatically with Wilde’s literary work. One of the few contemporary critics not enchanted by *The Importance of Being Earnest* was George Bernard Shaw; he thought the play “heartless.” Though the judgement feels narrow, it does not feel wrong. The play is the most masterful of Wilde’s literary achievements, but it shares with his other work a mechanical quality. Its mastery, in fact, seems to derive from the aplomb with which Wilde puts his machinery on display – like a magic trick that works even after the secret has been revealed. Something floats free of the machinery; but as with the something that floats free of *Pale Fire* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, it is not quite a human thing. The play ends up pointing at itself – in ways that become less interesting the more they are examined – and not toward the world outside itself.

Wilde’s thought, as it emerges in his published work, is consistent – and even, arguably, systematic. It handles the philosophical implications of its premises with almost careless brilliance – as in the imaginary dialogues “The Decay of Lying” and “The Critic as Artist,” which examine the effect of the principles of scientific determinism on aesthetic values with a daring that outstrips even Pater’s. In the end, though, very little remains to carry away. Wilde’s writing – to apply a standard that seems dated but whose relevance, given Ellmann’s claim, is inescapable – does not change our lives. Wilde always promises to scandalize us, but like most purveyors of scandal what he has to say is never *personally* shocking, in the way that the work of Blake

and Nietzsche and Freud is meant to shock our pieties about ourselves. If Wilde's writings seem irresistible, it is because there is very little in them to resist.

The business of characterizing the tendencies of Wilde's work, with a view to establishing what is singular and important about it, gives Ellmann trouble. Faced with the apparent inconsistency between Wilde's philosophical materialism and his interest in mystical and ritualistic institutions such as the Masonic Order (which he sampled while at Oxford) and the Catholic Church (which he flirted with during his Oxford years and joined on his deathbed), Ellmann proposes that "contradictoriness was his orthodoxy." And elsewhere, noting that the spirit informing the critical essays in *Intentions* seems to be the inverse of the spirit informing *De Profundis*, he suggests that for Wilde "oscillation is a cardinal principle; it can be observed at work within each book as well as between books."

But conferring a unity on Wilde's thought by ascribing discrepancies to the intention to produce discrepancies threatens to reproduce the paradox-mongering avant-gardist that Ellmann wants to replace with the serious moralist. So when contradictions crop up at points in Wilde's writing that matter to the coherence of a larger view of things, Ellmann volunteers to paper over the division. For instance:

That art is sterile, and that art is infectious, are attitudes not beyond reconciliation. Wilde never formulated their union, but he implied something like this: by its creation of beauty, art reproaches the world, calling attention to the world's faults by disregarding them, so the sterility of art is an affront or a parable. Art may also outrage the world by flouting its laws or by indulgently positing their violation. Or art may seduce the world by making it follow an example which seems bad but is really salutary. In these ways the artist moves the world towards self-recognition, with at least a tinge of self-redemption, as he compels himself towards the same end.

This is, in aesthetic theory, the higher utilitarianism: art does us good by turning its back on our welfare. It is familiar as, among other things, an academic justification for the study of modern literature. If Wilde did believe it, then (a) contradictoriness was apparently *not* his orthodoxy, and (b) he is not as interesting or subversive a thinker as "The Critic as Artist" and "The Decay of Lying" and *The Importance of Being Earnest* make him seem.

And are all these things really inconsistencies? Like most critics, Wilde had what might be called a theoretical aspect and a practical aspect to his thought. As a theoretical matter he regarded sincerity, originality, and truth-to-life as phantom values, impossible to ground or to verify; as a practical critic, he often expressed admiration for writing that struck him as sincere,

fresh, realistic. To consider this either a deliberate vacillation or a weakness in need of shoring up is like complaining that Plato's *Republic*, since it is clearly a work of literature, has no business condemning literature. Nobody lives in the world of theory; there is no gravity there. Wilde knew this almost as well as Plato did, and better than some theoretical critics of our own day.

Nor is a fascination with mysteries a betrayal of materialism. Wilde wasn't interested in the aura of the Church – or, for that matter, in the aura of the beautiful object – because he suspected it reflected a truth denied by materialism; he made himself quite clear on this point several times. He was interested because the religious experience, like the aesthetic experience, though it is undeniably real to those who have it, seems to lie beyond the explanatory reach of materialism's vocabulary, and it is the duty of the materialist to honor whatever is real in experience – as William James tried to do in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and as Freud tried to do in *The Future of an Illusion*. Wilde and Pater are often charged with having confused religion with art, with having created a cult of the beautiful to substitute for a cult of divinity. But there was nothing transcendentalist about their aestheticism: it was founded on an entirely realistic recognition that the experience of art is qualitatively different from the experience of everything else, and that something in the experience of art survives even a materialist's analysis. "Everything will pass, and the world will perish," Mikhail Bakunin (no transcendentalist) is supposed to have said shortly before his death in 1876, "but the Ninth Symphony will remain." To assume that the nineteenth century's view of art was determined by its need to replace a godhead it lacked the fortitude to live without is simple condescension – unless we feel we understand completely ourselves how we make the distinction between things that are art and things that are not.

* * *

The central event, which is also the central mystery, in Wilde's life was his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, whose father, the Marquess of Queensberry, goaded Wilde into bringing the lawsuit that quickly rebounded on him and led to his downfall. The relationship is mysterious because it is impossible to explain Wilde's fascination with Douglas, a man whom W. H. Auden described as "a vicious, gold-digging, snobbish, anti-Semitic, untalented little horror for whom no good word can be said," and whom Wilde himself once referred to as a "gilded pillar of infamy." Douglas was famous for his personal beauty – though to judge from photographs it seems to have been beauty of a rather metallic sort – but he and Wilde ceased having sexual relations fairly early, simply living together in various hotels and country houses while each pursued his own conquests. Douglas did

everything he could to milk the relationship professionally, in ways Wilde was quite aware of. And though Wilde obligingly trumpeted Douglas's literary genius, *De Profundis* makes the true nature of his regard for Douglas's talents quite clear.

Ellmann's treatment of this ill-starred romance has an almost novelistic interest, though he relies a little uncritically on the accounts Wilde provided in *De Profundis* – a work that is, after all, a lover's complaint and self-justification, and therefore scarcely to be considered a documentary record. Ellmann indulges in less detail about Wilde's sexual habits than H. Montgomery Hyde does in his *Oscar Wilde* (1975), but he gives a good idea of the extent to which the pursuit of fresh young men became an obsession for Wilde, persisting, to the dismay of many friends, even in his last years.

Still, a strange defensiveness creeps into Ellmann's description of this side of Wilde's biography. "What seems to characterize all Wilde's affairs," he concludes at one point, "is that he got to know the boys as individuals, treated them handsomely, allowed them to refuse his attentions without becoming rancorous, and did not corrupt them. They were already prostitutes." These sentences sound like special pleading, but that is not what's wrong with them. What's wrong is that they are not true. In 1893, to take one instance, Wilde's close friend Robert Ross invited a sixteen-year old schoolboy called Philip Danney to London for the weekend. Ross informed Douglas about Danney, and Douglas rushed to London and brought the boy back to Goring, where he and Wilde were staying. "On Saturday," according to Oscar Browning, whose brother-in-law was Danney's headmaster, "the boy slept with Douglas, on Sunday he slept with Oscar. On Monday he returned to London and slept with a woman at Douglas's expense. On Tuesday he returned to Bruges [where the school was located] three days late." The boy's father, an army colonel, found out through the school about the escapade and threatened legal action, but the affair was kept quiet in the end. And potentially the most serious charge brought against Wilde during his trial for "acts of gross indecency" involved a seventeen-year-old named Edward Shelley, who was not a prostitute. Shelley's testimony (which Ellmann does not quote), though it was ultimately disallowed, makes it apparent that Wilde had several times tried to seduce him, not violently but concertedly, and against Shelley's wishes. Wilde did not limit his field of sexual play to young men who were already, as Ellmann puts it, "corrupt."

The predatory character of Wilde's sexuality belongs to a minor but significant side of his personality – the hedonistic cult of Oscar that caused its chief devotee to conduct himself at times with insufferable egotism and snob-bishness. Still, this was part of the continuous performance that made Wilde a magnetic figure, even in his occasionally repellent aspects, to his contemporaries, and that makes us regret again and again, as we read of the famous mots and the extraordinary charm, that Wilde died just before (and so

tantalizingly close to) the age of mechanical reproduction. On the other hand, one wonders whether the celebrated manner, if we had the sort of visual and phonographic record of it that we have of even the most transient star in the contemporary firmament, might not strike us as anachronistic and faintly ludicrous. Wilde was self-consciously a man of his age. The stress he placed on the role of taste in society – the way he seemed to turn every question about art or politics into a question about taste – is one of the things that make him appear less important to many readers than Arnold or Ruskin. But that emphasis also reflects, I think, Wilde's sense of the culture-bound nature of culture. He did not make transhistorical claims for art or ideas. He did not try to speak to us and that is one of the things that make him interesting.

"Possibly the best account yet written of what it was like to be at the center of New York bohemianism in the 1950s and 1960s." —Russell Banks



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Hettie was a Jewish girl from Queens seeking escape from her conventional family in the world of the Beats. Defying racism to marry playwright LeRoi Jones and sexism to achieve recognition as a poet and writer of award-winning children's books, she lived what she calls "a charmed life in the middle of other people's wars."

"A beautifully written—and brave—memoir. It's told with such heart and unsparing honesty that it becomes every woman's story.... I was deeply touched." —Gloria Naylor

"She certainly has told it like it was!... She reminds us how many issues were set in relief and struggled with and are still with us."

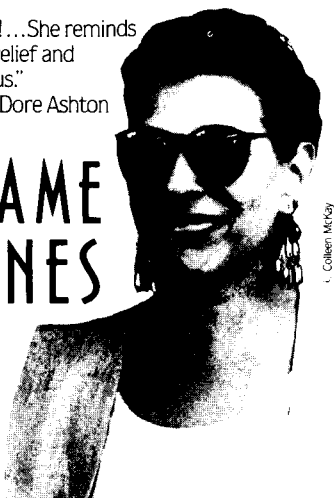
—Dore Ashton

HOW I BECAME HETTIE JONES

HETTIE JONES



DUTTON
Penguin USA



© Colleen Mackay

POEMS

Derek Walcott

OMEROS*

Seven Seas rose in the half-dark to make coffee.
Sunrise was heating the ring of the horizon
and clouds were warming like loaves. By the heat of the

glowing iron rose he slid the saucepan's base on-
to the ring and anchored it there. The saucepan shook
from the weight of water in it, then it settled.

His kettle leaked. He groped for the tin chair and took
his place near the saucepan to hear when it bubbled.
It would boil but not scream like a bosun's whistle

to let him know it was ready. He heard the dog's
morning whine under the boards of the house, its tail
thudding to be let in, but he envied the pirogues

already miles out at sea. Then he heard the first breeze
washing the sea-almond's plates; last night there had been
a full moon white as his eyes. He saw with his ears.

He imagined roofs as the sun began to climb.
Since the disease had obliterated vision,
when the sunset shook the sea's hand for the last time –

and an inward darkness grew where the moon and sun
indistinctly altered, he moved by a sixth sense,
like a clock without an hour or second hand,

wiped clean as the plate that he now began to rinse
while the saucepan bubbled; blindness was not the end.
It was not a palm-tree's dial on the noon sand.

* A selection from *Omeros* by Derek Walcott to be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
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So his mind sailed like the plate through black thunderheads
even in broad daylight, with no present or past,
like the moon that rose from the basin's foaming suds,

making dinner at dawn, and, at supper, breakfast.
He slept in Egypt and woke in Benin. Galleys
beat their oars to his fingers. He turned off the ring

of the stove and sensed its warm iris, like his eyes
as the flames turned blue, then rose, suddenly fading
with his sight. The coffee made his nostrils widen.

The dog scratched at the kitchen door for him to open
but he made it wait. He drummed the kitchen table
with his hand. Blackbirds were quarrelling for breakfast.

Except for one hand he sat as still as marble,
with his egg white eyes, his spoon repeating the past
of another sea, measured by stroking hammers.

O open this day with the conch's moan, Omeros,
as they did in my boyhood, when I was a noun
gently exhaled from the palate of the sunrise.

A lizard on the sea-wall darted its question
at the waking sea, and a net of golden moss
brightened the reef, which the sails of their far canoes

avoided. Only in you, across centuries
of the sea's parchment atlas, can I catch the noise
of the surf lines wandering like the shambling fleece

of the lighthouse's flock, that Cyclops whose blind eye
shut from the sunlight. Then the canoes were galleys
over which a frigate sawed its scythed wings slowly.

In you the grey seeds of almonds guessed a tree's shape,
and the grape leaves rusted like serrated islands,
and the blind lighthouse, sensing the edge of a cape,

paused like a giant, a cloud held high in its hands,
to hurl a boulder that splashed into phosphorous
stars, then a black fisherman, his stubbled chin coarse

as a dry sea-urchin's, hoisted his flour-sack
sail on its bamboo spar, and scanned the opening line
of our epic horizon; writing I look back

to rocks that see their own feet when light nets the waves,
as the long dugouts set out with their carved captains,
since it was your name that startled the sunlit wharves

when schooners swayed, idly moored to their cold capstans,
and wind turned the harbour's pages back to the voice
that hummed in the vase of a girl's throat: "Omeros."

Anne Stevenson

INVERKIRKAIG

*For Dorothy and Jonathan Brett Young
September 1986*

Bloodshed cries *Ai Ai*
in the colour of rowan berries.
Birds will eat wounds all winter.

Flayed hills keep breathing
through the slashing –
waterfall, fighterplane, waterfall.

The salmon leaps and fails.
Drowned to his thigh,
the man praises courage with a hook.

Six men, twelve wings, and the sky cracks
successfully. The squadron
is out of heaving when it falls.

With its gentian eye, the lock
praises gleaming and burnishing.
The salmon leaps and fails.

The man goes on casting and reeling.
A late rain erases in pitiless mercy
home, story, arterial berry.

Tomaž Šalamun

EPISTLE TO THE ANGRY ONES

My brain is a butterfly, a soft precious material
a transparent silk. Swinging your clubs can
really damage it, or at least, destroy my day.
Can you imagine a butterfly, which gets worn out

by the strategy of armored units by holding back
a beast as furious as Professor Ziherl, whom I love
in principle. Every lost pulsation is a sin, every
lost chance to rest on a blossom is a classic example

of social pathology. My brain is the universe, wider
than blue. It kindly watches the white sharks tiring
themselves out in the seaweed because the Lord gave every
tiny animal the right to eat. It's miles and miles

between the seaweed and the phoenix. The white shark
is not even a dolphin which could snare ordinary flying
fish in its lovely arc. This man will die sad and
hungry if he chooses from such an impossible menu.

Wong May

MR. DOBSON & THE AFTER-LIFE OF CARNATIONS

If there are secrets
A man can keep apart from Death
he believes in them. From the Florist's dump
 of rotting ferns & tall boxes marked "Holland"
he picked carnations, discreetly
carnations

Miklos Radnoti

A VAGUE ODE

How many ages is it since I first tried to reveal
the dark star-system of my tenderness,
if but an image or quintessence of the real.
But you, like Being itself, do so possess,
so swarm and flow in me, – and yet you're calm, eternal, as
a shell shut in the stone. Above, it seems,
night, with its sheen of moony nacre, rustling flies:
it's hunting after little fluttering dreams.
Yet what it really means to me to feel your glance
guarding my hand at work, I still can't say.
Similes just won't do. Images have no chance.
They light up briefly; I throw them away
and start it all again tomorrow; they were wrong.
What worth a word has, I have, standing where
the poet sets it in the poem: you quicken me as long
as bones remain, and a few wisps of hair.
You're tired. Our day was filled with far too many things.
Dare I say more? Things catch each other's eye,
conspire to praise you: a half-cube of sugar rings
there on the table; a honey-drop nearby
glitters upon the cloth, a marble of pure gold;
all by itself an empty glass will chime.
Happy to be with you. Perhaps it can be told,
how that glass waits for you, if I have time.
Dream's darknesses are brushing at your brow,
flutter away, and then return. Your eyes
are sleepy as their lids, which wave goodbye. And now
your hair undoes itself, spreads like a blaze,
and you're asleep. Your eyelash-shadow leaps. Your arm
falls on my pillow like a white birch bough.
But strange. You're not an *other* world: I'm sleeping in you now;
even this far away I *hear* them change:
the thin wise lines mysterious
of your cool palm.

**Translated from the Hungarian by
Zsuzsanna Ozsvath and Frederick Turner**

Francisco Brines

SONG OF SLEEPLESSNESS

All is night and here is the song of a rooster.
He sings it one night, and then another night.
I wait for his song every night.
It's piercing; it's dark, the voice of that rooster.
The light is sour, the rooster bursts through night.
I touch the darkness, and listen to the rooster.
You've lost another night, says the rooster.
Until there is no rooster there is no night.

Translated from the Spanish by Don Share

Miguel Hernández

THREE POEMS

The cemetery lies near
where you and I are sleeping,
among blue nopales,
blue pitas, and children
who shout at the top of their lungs
if a corpse darkens the street.

From here to the cemetery, everything
is blue, golden, clear.
Four steps away, the dead.
Four steps away, the living.

Clear, blue and golden.
My child grows remote there.

*

You were like the young
fig tree by the cliffs.
And when I passed by
you filled the sierra with sound.

Like the young fig tree,
resplendent and blind.

You are like the fig tree.
The old fig tree.
I pass, and silence
and dry leaves greet me.

You are like the fig tree
that lightning struck old.

*

Love rose up between us
like the moon between two palmtrees
that never embraced.

The intimate murmur of the two bodies
surged toward a lullaby,
but the hoarse voice was torn out with pincers,
the lips were hard as stone.

The longing to encircle moved the flesh,
lit up the kindled bones,
but as they tried to stretch out, the arms
died in each other.

Love, the moon, passed between us
and devoured the solitary bodies.
And we are two ghosts who search for each other
and find ourselves far apart.

Translated from the Spanish by Don Share

William Logan

CHAMBER MUSIC

The world of physical objects cannot stain
the minor texts our summer nights applaud:
 the firefly's careless shimmer, its Morse Code
 of syntax correcting Keats' ode
 To Autumn's now tubercular refrain:
There is no mercy where there is no God.

When Dachau's Jews and whores were sacrificed
to Christian sacraments, no Savior dawned
 like a black sun on the Black Sea: the wine
 of old communion kept the dead in line.
The weak fish grappled in the claws of Christ,
the osprey turning from His shattered pond.

We have our music too. It substitutes
the flames of Wagner for a string quartet.
 The violinist lifts his bow, and with a nod
 the gray conductor lifts the hand of God
 and dips his black baton. A barren flute
take eighth notes from the rage of sunset.

Sophie Cabot Black

THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF NATURE

I cannot stop watching her and thinking
Of ways to follow. Against the windows
Her urgent spring buds strangle,

Summer aches with what longs to loosen,
A wet fall leaf hits clapboards. By winter
She pulls back into ice, but even then gives herself away;

To push myself right up to her, looking hard into
What it is she leaves behind. I believed I'd learn
How to change my life, like getting in a car and slamming the pedal

Until it goes into beauty, then beyond
Beauty, then staying there, until my blood also starts
To give itself away. Only I am still

In my own room, talking myself into a new gratitude.
Each evening a transaction breaks the landscape:
A child at the door, the cow crossing to the barn.

Only then does the light finally change. The child
Wants to know about trees not growing to the sky,
About rivers running north, about the length of night:

The cow makes deep sounds, the old complaint,
And the light falls suddenly like that,
Down into patient arms

Yet has been falling all afternoon, giving itself away: the great
Wheel turns, gently passes over mountains,
Over their dark green breaths, over my blood

That curls and uncurls waiting, over all that time
I was sure something was wrong,
Over those democracies that she will always bring

Of cow, ice, light, and child.
Each with a gift for the other: it is perhaps
Without waiting or corresponding to anything at all.

Philip Appleman

**UNDER A CROWN OF THORNS,
SOME QUESTIONS ARISE ABOUT GENESIS 1:27**

We're cast in the image of God, yes,
but up here the image blurs:
that Pharisee over there,
the one with the burro's belly
and a toad's complexion,
is that the real thing, God
in the flesh?
Or maybe that saintly starveling, all
bones in his pinched piety – is God proud
of a profile like that?

Just days ago, these very faces,
rainbowed with joy, saw palms
ripped and strewn for the Son of Man – and now
my palms are crimson,
and it's all changed: bloodlust
smudges the thousand faces of God, and here
in the fog of this Friday
anticlimax, just
look at them, the veins
in that legionnaire's legs, the brutal
mouth, the pocked face, and –
and of course the splendid curve
of that woman's hip, that too –
it all counts,
doesn't it?

I suppose they aren't even asking themselves,
those Godly faces out for fun,
expecting something big today, something
spectacular – so I should be telling them,
now, while there's still time:
you can't pay off an ugly squint

with a nice ankle, a luscious
lower lip won't make up
for a running sore, and above all, nobody
ever promised you justice, that's not
why you were *chosen*.

All you have to know is
that a beautiful shoulder is God, sure,
but a twisted leg is God, too,
and pimples and crooked noses and bad teeth,
because God is our dark
reflection in a glass, one part heredity,
one part environment.

So up here, getting this four-star view,
I hear the voices of God on every side,
all hustling me – Hang in there,
it's your big scene – and I call out
to every Godlike wart,
to every sacred boil and pustule
(the nails tearing at my hands),
I call to every divine breast,
to every holy quim on this hill of skulls:
Why?
Why have you
forsaken me?

Daniel Wolff

THE THINKING BETWEEN TWO WAVES

I'm dreaming a dream as clear as glass
when a handful of pebbles hits the window. The morning
shudders and breaks. I look out through the holes
in my sleep to see you: standing alone in the street.
Your soft hair glows. You wave.

The only sense that my morning
brain takes is the word “glass” –
and the fact that there are these holes
in the world – and something about a wave.
I stare blindly at the street.

Aren’t boulders by the shore like holes
that open and close with each incoming wave?
And isn’t their black bulk, in fact, glass?
And aren’t my eyes, looking out on the street,
the same? Men in t-shirts, on any given morning,

lift huge rocks and then, with a wave,
let them drop – so the morning
shudders and breaks: its pieces pressed to make the street
or melted down into holes
of air: white hot air: glass.

What a great industrial idea! Meanwhile, down on the street,
you’re still waiting. The thin scratches in the glass
between us look, suddenly, like your hair in the morning
when it streams across my face. “So there are holes
in the logic of logic,” I think. And then wake. And wave.

Peter Balakian

MANDELSTAM IN ARMENIA, 1930

Between arid houses and crooked streets
a shadow could be your wife or a corpse
and a mule’s hooves sounded like Stalin’s
fat fingers drumming a table.

In the Caucasus eagles and hawks
hung in the blue’s basilica.
A swallow flew off a socle
into the wing of an echo –

history's caw and chirp and bird shit
on the tombs in the high grass.
On hairy serrated stems
poppies flagged like tongues.

Petals of flat paper
lined your thumb-out pockets.
Anther seeds burned your pen.

From a cloud of broom the red bee stumbled,
and snuggled in your fish-globe brain.
A casket of honey-colored light
kissed the eyebrows of a tree.

Perch slithered the helix of your ear
Sevan's rippling blue skirt
caressed your chest; waves lapped,
gulped, tongued you fresh.

When the evening air settled
on the creatures of the mountain
the sun was an ovum
or the head of the Virgin.

Here, where the bush grew with fresh blood
and ancient thorns, you picked the rose
without scissors. Buried your hand
in the bramble. Became an omen.

K. E. Duffin

GOETHE AT NAPLES

The sky is overcast, and a sirocco is blowing,
as if the grasses were compelled to write
an invisible page, and then another –
something fierce and warm and bureaucratic
grabs them, takes them up into the sky,
where the burly light insists,
“Here, let me have that.”
A weather for writing letters.

I've seen too much: rabble and beauty,
astonishing horses, dazzling fish.
Everywhere, the heaving sides of life,
with touches of sweat, and oil and sea.
And paintings one needs a candle to find
in churches smaller than books.
Each picture is like a cracked maze,
or a blackened map. Ugly at first.
Then one notices a single hand, or an eye,
a glimpse of one's beloved in a crowd.

The memory of Rome is like an old
dilapidated monastery, badly placed
on piddling flats that smell of sewage
and senile empire. Here, the sea
lets the land breathe toward Palermo.

The lungs of a frigate fill –
like a saint's – all will, the body flayed
and gone. That's how the ancients seem to me,
sceptic, emboldened, fleshless –
Between Cape Minerva and Capri,
the boat disappears – if I were to watch
a person I loved sail away like that,
I wouldn't survive it.

The harbor waves are frisky in the wind.
Like the noble horses, yesterday,
threading dirty streets –
my heart went out to them –
a line of straggling gold,
varicose vein of ore in dull hills.

This is a world where psalms make sense,
though the earth is changeable as weather.

Don't think of certain dangers,
especially one of which I needn't speak.

I enclose the envelope of your last letter,
scorched in one corner.

Alice Fulton

THE PIVOTAL KINGDOM

A head capsized the wild mechanism of May
and a body followed, casting off
its muddy husk.
I gazed at him from the raised walkway
of the excavation site,
through dust the color of suntan.
I wanted to stroke a thing so warmly
smooth, a uniform khaki, on bended knee.
I wouldn't mind touching hands
tensed round centuries
of hiatus in place of vanished weapons.
His motions tabled for millennia,
he'd had a long word with the earth.
He'd lodged in its plutonic gut,
an emptiness strung with pulse. Like all mortals,

I have a nodding acquaintance
with the dark.
You know our slogan: keep it light.
The tiled tunnels beneath rivers, fallout
shelters, the undersides of bridges
where sunbeams slither
like lizards on adhesive toes
are good at holding
shadows. But shadows aren't hard
blackness as much as patterns
lit by lesser light.
Even our refrigerators are stuffed
with glow, like well-appointed homes.
Though it's no strain to visit the abandoned
mines beneath Detroit,
the transformers choked in power
lines under Manhattan's tailored granite,
I wouldn't want to lodge

in the clay warrior's dense bed.
I'd miss the inner city
of sensation so solid you'd swear it was

embodied: Yearning, an expansive
mansion in the marrow; pain,
a charger of barbed wire;
and joy, a freed slave hoisting
hallelujahs through the nerves.
But is this private sector hidden
in heart or brain or bone?
Does it hold
eminent domain inside our heads, live in
vivid ampules under wraps
of fat, swim through tissue's minnowed shadings
or skin subtil by polar tongues,
the opalescent flecks of cellulite
like spectral residues
in flesh? As Socrates said
life's intrinsic
to the soul but accidental
to the body. He said
if the spirit does exist
it isn't a good mixer. In my book
inclusions are not accidents,

though accidents exist.
It's best to conscript them,
the way jazz repeats a slip
till it sounds right.
Just think, it was a mistake
made by plants that created oxygen
and led to us, builders
of plants that change air back
to what our lungs can't trust.
The pivotal kingdom holds

crossbows rigged against intruders,
terra cotta soldiers guarding
rivers reproduced in small,
and shuttlecocking constellations
at the top. Walking, we're borne
up by glancing blows
that form the ground, spirit cities
fraught with once and future
euphorias, with wars.

David Twersky

EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

According to most observers of Israel, Arabs and Jews live separate lives. In Hebrew literature, Arabs play a significant role, but as messengers in dreams, objects of fear and loathing, or the cause of national shame and guilt. (This depends not only on the writer and his worldview but on the period in which the images were committed to paper.)

Unlike America's invisible black men and women who lived and often still do live in a world apart, Israeli Arabs speak – that is, live, dream, think and imagine – in language, and in an historical and theological frame of reference (Christian or Moslem) other than their own. Although they share with Israeli Jews a certain number of economic relationships, political activities, and citizenship, social interaction appears to be largely ceremonial.

The introduction of the Palestinian Arabs of the occupied territories into the equation has created a new set of relationships. Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs both have spent (or grew up during) twenty years in a socio-political reality radically different from that of the period between 1947 and 1967. This new reality presented itself as a temporary condition, existing in pending time. The evolving pattern of relationships, almost set in stone after two decades and more, was also temporary, pending a diplomatic settlement. Israel was administering the territories pending negotiations with the Arab world. In the dimension of pending time, any moral complications arising from the occupation are only temporary in nature, and responsibility for them devolves on the Arabs who block a settlement of the dispute – which alone can end the occupation.

During that period, Israeli Jews sought to ensure that it would be impossible to return to the pre-1967 status. Jewish settlers acted out a farcical (yet tragic) replay of the "heroic" early period of "pioneering Zionism." In advancing the program of the right, they coopted the historical symbolism of the left. Bereft of symbols, other Israeli Jews were shielded from the increasing harshness of real-time life through the "pending time" mechanism. We now are aware that the other two sides of the triangle were each inventing their own versions of history. But on all sides, new generations have grown up knowing only "pending time" reality. For the Jewish young, the international border (the 1967 "green line") no longer exists; Israel stretches on through the decompression chamber of ambiguous sovereignty in the West Bank to the Jordanian frontier. For Palestinians, the Jordanian occupation is a dimly perceived historical accident. They measure their lives against those they see daily in secular, democratic Israel.

At the same time, Israeli Arabs have, paradoxically, become both more Israeli and more Arab. They increasingly demand fuller integration,

inclusion, and equal treatment in the distribution of services – although not yet for equality of obligations, as in an alternative (to military) form of national service. They do not shy away from articulating a dovish-to-radical pro-PLO foreign policy, or from voting in large numbers. They are, inevitably, distinctly Israeli Arabs, and this process is bound to take its toll in a society dominated by the culture-specific (and exclusionary) symbols of the Jewish majority.

Thus, while Israeli (and Diaspora) Jewish society is periodically thrown into an uproar over Orthodox rabbinic attempts to restrict the definition of “Who is a Jew?”, Israeli Arabs are stretching the meaning of “Who is an Israeli?”. To most Jewish Israelis, Israel is a Jewish state, within the context of Jewish historical experience, and bears the scars of the internal contradictions of that history. But seventeen percent of the citizens of the Israeli state are Arabs. Their citizenship is modified by the fact that in some measure their loyalties are divided between Israel and the Arab world which has been unremittingly hostile to the “Jewish” state. But by now they are undeniably Israeli Arabs, speak Hebrew, and seek to expand (or eliminate) the definitions which narrow their possibilities. The program of the largely Arab-supported Israeli communist party, for example, is more of an Israeli Arab civil rights party rather than a Marxist-Leninist avant garde.

There were no forty years of solitude. Beneath the masks of silence, Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians are almost obsessively thinking about, if not always talking to, each other. Twenty years after the occupation began, and just as the *intifada* – the Palestinian “uprising” – volcanically erupts and forever alters the landscape, two books have appeared, written in Hebrew, aimed at Jewish Israeli readers, *Epistles to the Hebrews. Arabesques*¹ and *The Yellow Wind*² emerged like two butterflies from their cocoons, or like time bombs that had been ticking for two decades.

The Yellow Wind first appeared in the now defunct newsweekly *Koteret Rashit*, which devoted a full issue to novelist David Grossman’s account of his journey through the West Bank. The book does not contain any startling revelations about the “evils” of the occupation, and yet its publication created a major stir. Although it steers clear of politicizing or mere reportage, *The Yellow Wind* fractures irrevocably the view of Israel frozen in its pre-1967 (pre-occupation) mode. That Grossman is able to do this without the usual heavy dose of Jewish guilt, and without suspending his sense of irony and cynicism when it comes to the Arab voices in the book, makes his achievement all the more noteworthy. *The Yellow Wind* is a novel contribution to the literature of the Israeli-Arab dispute because it navigates between the ice-

¹ *Arabesques*. By Anton Shammas. Harper and Row. \$16.95.

² *The Yellow Wind*. By David Grossmann. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$17.95.

bergs of political solutions, myth and guilt, choosing to skate on the thin cover of experience. Grossman records the voices, images, and impressions flowing beneath the ice.

The Arabs do not emerge unscathed as “suffering victims.” The occupation does not lose its multi-dimensional (national security) character. And overall, the Israel of *The Yellow Wind* does not resemble a refuge for the tired, poor, hungry survivors from Europe yearning to breathe freely. Still, those former refugees from Europe and the Middle East and their children (like Grossman) are breathing freely – enough (to judge by this book) to confront the harsh realities imposed on them by Arab hostility and its brutal stepchild, the occupation.

Like Amos Oz’s political travelogue, *In the Land of Israel*, which originally appeared in weekly installments as essays in the Labor paper *Davar*, Grossman’s book has brought to the forefront of consciousness what rhetoric had bludgeoned into an unconscious forgetfulness. Reacting to *The Yellow Wind*, the author A.B. Yehoshua said: “The bigger and more rotten the problems (with the occupation) the more effective the filters” which shield Israeli Jews from confronting them. Grossman’s book, Yehoshua went on, “shook up the filters.” Thus it must be read in the context of political novels which have helped galvanize a society by expressing in language, the alphabet of imagination, what was already known but not acknowledged.

Grossman’s account reads like a travel notebook, with none of the hyperbole of the polemics which dominate the Jewish-Arab discourse. The book carries a heavy dose of intellectual and moral authority precisely because of (and in inverse proportion to) the quiet, understated eloquence of its prose. One cannot help but wonder whether this reflects merely a literary conceit; after all, Grossman’s notebook reads like a piece in an Israeli version of *The New Yorker*, but the West Bank is hardly 6,000 miles away from his home in Jerusalem. And a novelist-cum-journalist like Grossman, who came of age together with the 1967 war and the acquisition of the territories, can hardly pose as an ingenue, a tourist unfamiliar with the details he describes.

This is not pretension on Grossman’s part. The book has more impact because it allows its principal intended audience – Israeli Jews jaded by reports of the occupation – to let down their defenses before reconfronting a reality made all the more agonizing by the apparent absence of solutions.

He cites a study of the dreams of Arab and Jewish children – almost all of whom have dreamed about “conflict” – concluding that “among us, even dreams are crushed under the weight of reality.” The dreams “offer neither escape nor relief” – and neither does *The Yellow Wind*. Grossman resists the temptation to serve up rehashed theoretical solutions. But if the situation is so bad, so dehumanizing for both Arabs and Jews, how can we be satisfied with Grossman’s penultimate appeal for a “passage from speech to moral action?” Israeli discourse is heavy with solutions, a problem in itself. Grossman states

that he wants to avoid the familiar: "When I left on this journey," he tells us near the end of our guided tour, "I decided not to talk with Jewish or Arab politicians or officials. Their positions are well known to the point of weariness."

Like many Israeli Jews, Grossman is tired of both the dovish left's "democratic Jewish state" and the right's "the people of Israel in the land of Israel" sloganeering. ". . . After twenty years it seems to me that all the arguments, both rational and emotional, have already been made," he says.

The seduction of seeking solutions is that it keeps Israeli society from identifying the problem. If the problem is defined as "national security," the Palestinians are reduced to a footnote, the moral dimensions of the occupation to a sidebar. Conversely, if the problem is defined only in moral terms, as in so much of the literature on the subject in this country, Israel's very real security concerns are swept under the carpet. The focus on solutions has given the political culture a mechanism to avoid the slow and painful tick of the real-time clock.

As the years have gone by, a generation of Jews and Palestinians grew into an adulthood, the parameters of which were conditioned by the realities of the Israeli administration of the territories. And Israel's presence in the territories became increasingly characterized by a politics of permanence; for Jewish settlers and politicians of the right, the status of the territories was in abeyance pending their integration into or annexation by Israel. According to researchers like Meron Benvenisti, the connection between Israel and the territories has become inexorable, having progressed beyond the point of separation, a Catholic marriage no priest would or could annul.

Grossman is one of those Israelis whose coming of age coincided with this "new" Israel. He was thirteen – bar mitzvah – in 1967:

. . . the surging energy of our adolescent hormones was coupled with the intoxication gripping the entire country; the conquest, the confident penetration of the enemy's land, his complete surrender, breaking the taboo of the border, imperiously striding through the narrow streets of cities until now forbidden, and the smells, the primal view, and that same erotic tingle latent in every first meeting between conqueror and conquered – ah, what a sensuous explosion of all the pent-up desire that was in us! And on a grand scale! With the entire country!

Speaking of himself, as well as of his culture, Grossman writes: "We have lived for twenty years in a false and artificial situation, based on illusions, on a teetering center of gravity between hate and fear. . . ." Had the

book begun rather than concluded with such an assertion, it would merely have added another chapter to the lengthy anti-occupation literature of the left. Novelist Anton Shammas praised *The Yellow Wind* “precisely because it does not meet the expectations of the left.” Grossman, he went on, “comes to this story like one who can still persuade the undecided, and those innocents who don’t know how to ask the right questions about the occupation . . .” (Shammas plays here on the Hebrew from the Passover Hagada story about the four sons.)

The Yellow Wind takes us through the by now familiar territory of refugee camps and Jewish settlements, Palestinian universities and workplaces. Grossman is a filter, a prism, not only a camera or a tape recorder. He catches details and nuances and makes the Palestinian “other” real to the Jewish Israeli. Americans appear to love “the good” Israeli, one who suffers his infliction of pain on others, which may account for the book’s celebrity in this country, despite its failure to clearly mark the passage to moral action and advocate or contemplate a solution. In fact, *The Yellow Wind* essentially tells us that among the solutions we must discard is the idea that Israel can “enjoy” the occupation on the cheap. Grossman concludes that “nothing matches the occupation as a great personal challenge. As a personal cross-roads demanding action and thought.”

Grossman’s questions might fade in the light of a settlement, but for Anton Shammas, a settlement will only exacerbate the concerns raised in his first novel, *Arabesques*. Shammas, a Christian Palestinian/Israeli from the Galilee village of Fasuta, demands an Israel in which Arab citizens can play an equal role. His argument was foreshadowed by a small Jewish literary/political group in the fifties called the “Cananites” who argued that Hebrew-speaking Israelis are not merely Jews in another place – but a different human breed altogether. As defined by one of its remaining practitioners, columnist Boaz Evron, Cananism “is the understanding that true independence in the area and peace depend on creating a political framework much broader than the existing ones. . . .” Specifically, Evron calls for a state “neutral from an ethnic and cultural point of view capable of incorporating different national groups.” If Evron is the question, Shammas is the answer. In a delicately crafted novel, Shammas peels away the many layers of his identity: as Arab, Christian, Palestinian, Israeli, writer, man. *Arabesques* is itself replete with irony: a major novel in Hebrew, the national and religious language of the Jews and the dominant language of the state of Israel, written by a non-Jew, an Arab at that.

The identity of “Israeli” and “Jew” is very strong, so strong that most people (including most Hebrew-speaking Israeli Jews) tend to ignore the reality that almost one of every six Israelis is an Arab. By writing in a subtle Hebrew, Shammas has stormed the Jewish fortress from within and aimed a sharp epistle at the Hebrew-reading public, that is, the Jews. *Arabesques*

fractures the Jewish image of Israel as a place where, at last, everyone is the same – Jewish – and everyone else is the “enemy.” The book moves back and forth between voices, locations and times. Its most lyrical passages introduce us to the richly tapestried life of the Arab villages, to the extended family structures and the cruel twists of fate that impose a grotesque form on the lives of the characters.

The persona, Anton Shammas, discovers that the cousin for whom he was named, long thought to have died as a child, was actually “illegally” adopted by a wealthy Beirut couple and grew up to be an American physician. He comes across a photograph of this alter ego examining the consequences of the 1982 massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. At the personal encounter between the two, which concludes the novel, “Anton Shammas,” the American physician, hands “Anton Shammas,” the central character of “The Tale” and “The Teller” sections of the novel, his own autobiographical retelling of the story. We are meant to be left wondering who, precisely, is a character in whose story. This is a bit of fun on Shammas’ part. Undoubtedly, many Palestinians have emigrated to the United States or fled to Paris (where the Israeli “Shammas” meets some cousins). But these are completely natural encounters for Israeli Jews forever fretting about the Jewish Diaspora – which refused to cooperate with Zionist ideology and emigrate or assimilate. For Israeli Jews, the Hebrews to whom the novel is addressed, Arabs are not supposed to have cousins who ended up as American physicians. Thus, the multiple identities of “Anton Shammas” speak to the experience of its intended readers.

Shammas’s characters are children groping toward the discovery of their sexuality, revolutionaries, bandits, priests, and villagers whose fate hangs by a thread above every page. Almost by chance, this one becomes a refugee, that one remains rooted in the village. There is another voice in the book, “Anton Shammas” the urbane (and urbanized) intellectual who has become estranged from the village. His tragedy is that if he cannot return to the village, there is nowhere else he can really go. Israel lacks a neutral social setting where Arabs and Jews can interact beyond roles imposed on them by history. For Shammas, identity is both infinitely rich and infinitely malleable. He meets an Israeli Jewish novelist (of the Yehoshua-Oz generation, older than himself) who seeks an “educated Arab” for his novel-in-progress. This novelist ultimately abandons Shammas for a Palestinian writer who, in his unbridled nationalism and uncomplicated identity is closer to the Israeli Jew than Shammas is to either of them. Introduced at a reception for writers as an Israeli, his host recounts how, as a child, he served as a “shabbos goy” for a Jewish family – naturally assuming that Shammas is Jewish.

Shammas has fun with the idea of writing in Hebrew: attending an international writer’s seminar at the University of Iowa, his Hebrew type-

writer is stolen. It turns up later in a washing machine. He also quotes from Jewish sources, including Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, a great teller of tales. Not only keyboards appear and disappear. People who play some part in the story in the 1940s reappear forty years later as hitchhikers or wanderers. A pair of shoes made by Anton's father is purchased by a Palestinian refugee fleeing Haifa, who is later murdered in a Lebanese mountain pass. The shoes are then taken by a Palestinian fighter who returns to the village where, caught by Israelis and forced to collaborate, he ultimately hangs himself because he "could not bear the humiliation of exile and the shame of wandering." Those shoes, made by Anton's father and sold to a wealthy refugee, ended up on this man's dangling feet: "And the shoes, which had been intended for endless wanderings, dance on the cold wind."

Shammas is a gifted and intelligent writer – and, moreover, one who gives voice to a central question that arises from within the internal Israeli reality. Unfortunately, he has wedded his writing to a political agenda. He seeks to "de-Zionize" Israel, not only to stretch Israeli identity beyond its Jewish context – but to sever the dialectical connection between the two. Shammas wants not to amend the Law of Return in order to narrow its application, as do many Orthodox Jews, but to eliminate it altogether, since it codifies in Israeli law the state's special connection to something beyond itself and its own human and geographical boundaries: Jewish history and the Jewish people. To Shammas, this special connection is an affront to democratic norms. As in all successful demagoguery, his critique has more than an element of truth.

To the degree that the bifurcation of functions between the state and Zionist movement expresses in structural terms a national schizophrenia, with Arab citizens receiving fewer services than their Jewish counterparts, Shammas is certainly on strong ground. But the Arab minority cannot deny the Jewish majority its right to self-determination, which in Israeli terms translates as an affirmation not only of Israeli statehood but also of a global Jewish peoplehood. The natural process of inclusion of Israeli Arabs will be a long one, and it must follow a peace settlement which will act to demystify "Arabs" to Israeli Jews (as well as the other way around).

In rejecting Shammas's answers, one need not dismiss his questions. If the Israeli Jewish majority must have the right to insist on projecting its significant symbols onto the Israeli state – symbols such as the Star of David or Jewish holidays, derived from Jewish history – the Arab minority has the right to make room for itself at all levels of society. Such a change, which must be seen as a function of rather than a prerequisite to a peace settlement, will require a revision of many fundamental assumptions of Israeli society but not their wholesale abandonment. Put another way, Shammas's elegantly conceived but discordant notes must be incorporated into the Israeli symphony, but they cannot replace that symphony. One is inclined to extend

his praise for Grossman's *The Yellow Wind* to his own *Arabesques*: "It appears to me," Shammas has written, "that Israeli Jewish consciousness will no longer be what it was [before the publication of *The Yellow Wind*]."

Rabbi Nachman, whom Shammas quotes, once said that a life can be an answer to a question asked long ago. In that sense, Shammas is the answer to the Cananites, but his answer raises new questions. Israeli society will ultimately have to confront and in some way answer the questions raised by Shammas in this impressive, even delicate novel. Israeli identity is still being forged in the furnaces *The Yellow Wind* and *Arabesques* describe. Out of those flames something beautiful will emerge. Not a mythic bird rising from the ash, but to use Grossman's terms (with apologies to Camus), something "human." In Grossman's sensibility of responsibility (despite the absence of proposed solutions) and in Shammas's use of history (if not in his less elegant attempts to promote a political agenda), we can catch a glimpse of the Israeli human still to come.

Deborah Solomon

PICASSO, BRAQUE, AND RUBIN

William Rubin's "Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism," held at the Museum of Modern Art last winter, was organized to be the greatest show on earth. And to many people, it was. While other exhibitions at the museum have attracted larger crowds (the Warhol and Vienna shows were more popular than this one), none have garnered higher critical praise. The exhibition was elephantine, with nearly four hundred works spread over two floors of the museum, yet it wasn't a blockbuster; a show that spans just seven years (1907-14), consists largely of brown paintings, and is devoted to the theme of how Picasso and Braque flattened out the space of a picture is not going to have lines of people wrapped around the block. Yet the show's narrowness – the way it honed in on the one, climactic moment when Picasso and Braque invented Cubism – is what reviewers seemed to admire, and they wrote about it with predictable hyperbole. One prominent critic said the show left him "speechless" – and then went on to produce a few prolix pages about it.

It isn't my intention here to criticize the critics, or to say that "Pioneering Cubism" doesn't deserve a good deal of praise. It was, by any standards, a terrific exhibition – one which managed to get us away from textbook notions about flat planes, fragmented forms, and so on, and allow us to witness the drama of Cubism's beginnings firsthand. The show had a you-were-there vividness. At one point, as I was standing before a Picasso collage from 1912, my gaze rested on a small rectangle the artist had clipped from a newspaper. Originally the rectangle must have been whitish, but now it was brown with age. It was strange to be reminded of the years that had passed since Picasso sat down and created this collage. For elsewhere in the show, in paintings and drawings, where there were no snippets of discolored newspaper to betray the passage of time, the works seemed not to have aged at all. They spoke to us with a directness and urgency that made it easy to forget that Cubism is now far away from us, a point on the historical time line, an epic from another epoch.

As much as I enjoyed the show, now that I sit down to write about it I find myself a bit uninspired. Perhaps that's because so much has already been written. Or perhaps it's because the show didn't significantly alter our sense of what Cubism is or how it began. Granted, it established unequivocally that Cubism was a joint venture. But is that a revelation? As early as 1928, Wilhelm Uhde, a Parisian art dealer who was friendly with both Picasso and Braque, described the relationship between the two artists as a "spiritual marriage" in which "one brought a great sensitivity, the other a great plastic gift." And many others in the years since have recognized the cardinal part

played by Braque in the formation of Cubism.

It goes without saying that an exhibition doesn't have to present a new slant on its subject in order to command our interest. Indeed, one of the real virtues of Rubin's show is that it didn't proselytize. Rather than trying to get us to look at Cubism in a particular light, it simply tried to get us to look. Typical of the show's pleasures was the chance to see a long-separated series of works from Picasso's summer home in the fishing village of Cadaqués. Seen one at a time, in their respective homes in France, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere, the Cadaqués works might seem like so many ordinary vacation-time sketches. Yet, taken together, they're amazing. Five of them depict a fishing boat docked at a harbor; at first the boat is drawn realistically, but then in later works it becomes abstract. As we watch this fishing boat dissolve from a solid object into a haze of jagged planes, it's as if we're watching the whole adventure of Cubism compressed into five works. "Pioneering Cubism" was full of classic moments like this one. It was a show that seems so synonymous with greatness that trying to review it is like trying to review *Ulysses*.

For all of these reasons I've decided not to approach it here in the standard way. What follows does not try to offer a comprehensive discussion of the exhibition, nor will it present the usual background information. It won't tell you how or when Picasso and Braque met, or rehash that quaint idea about Picasso and Braque being temperamental opposites – one slow and methodical, the other astonishing in his facility and productivity – who came together to achieve something neither could have achieved on his own. And it won't look at Cubism in relation to the art of our times (it has no relation, though that's not the fault of Cubism, but of our times). Rather it will consider several questions that remain unanswered.

What ever happened to Juan Gris? Not that long ago, when people thought about Cubism's early years, they thought about three key players: Picasso, Braque, and Juan Gris. When did the triumvirate shrink into a duo? Hardly anyone thinks about Gris anymore. None of his pictures or collages were included in "Pioneering Cubism." It's as if he had never existed.

Is this an injustice? In some ways, no. Gris wasn't essential to the founding of Cubism. His exact relation to the movement is by now well-documented: He arrived in Paris in 1906, after working as a commercial illustrator in Madrid, and promptly installed himself in the dilapidated studio building in the rue Ravignan where Picasso lived. In the next few years, as Picasso and Braque went about the business of inventing Cubism, Gris continued with his commercial work. Then, in 1911, he started painting seriously. An analytically-minded artist, he quickly assimilated the lessons of Cubism and went on to help instigate the collage revolution that began in 1912. Gris has been called the "conscience" of the movement, and this label fits him. Yet he didn't invent any of Cubism's most characteristic features, which is

presumably the reason he was left out of “Pioneering Cubism.”

It was a mistake, I think, to leave Gris out. The show would have been more interesting if it had included the various other artists – Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, Robert Delaunay, and particularly Léger – who joined up with the Cubist vanguard in Paris in its formative years. Cubism, unlike Surrealism, was never an official movement, yet in the early teens it more or less functioned as one; there were group exhibitions, printed pamphlets, regular meetings at a café (the Closerie des Lilas). This aspect of Cubism, its hold on a generation of young artists, wasn’t explored in “Pioneering Cubism.”

Rubin, of course, would argue in his defense that he wasn’t trying to chronicle the emergence of a movement. Rather he wanted to explore one of art history’s most important collaborations, and at that he certainly succeeded. Still, “Pioneering Cubism” seemed unnecessarily narrow. As we wandered through the galleries comparing the Picassos to the Braques, we were supposed to see that the two artists were carrying on a continuous “dialogue,” and we did. Yet, one couldn’t help wondering: didn’t these painters talk to anyone else in the course of their six-year alliance? One wanted to hear the other voices, feel the fullness of history. One wanted the whole story. Instead what we got is MOMA’s version of *Brief Encounter* – an unnaturally intense drama about two people who come together, achieve artistic ecstasy, then go off in separate directions. For all of its painstaking scholarship, “Pioneering Cubism” put a Hollywood spin on art history.

Which artist played a larger role in the founding of Cubism? In his essay for the catalogue, William Rubin makes it clear that he didn’t want the exhibition to turn into a competition. He’s not interested in tallying up Picasso and Braque’s separate achievements and making one artist more important than the other. Instead he presented them in a cloud of togetherness, as two painters who lived in Montmartre, were constantly meeting in each other’s studios, and influenced one another to such a degree that at times they couldn’t tell their work apart. It would be naive to pretend, however, that Picasso and Braque each contributed equally to Cubism; they didn’t. While the general public tends to think of Picasso as the leader, the impulsive genius who came up with everything, scholars now know it was just the opposite. It was Braque who created what are considered the first truly Cubist pictures (these are the landscapes from L’Estaque in which a profusion of tilting houses and trees fill the canvas from end to end) and who defined Cubism’s fundamental approach. Picasso was the first to make a collage, but Braque was the first to experiment with *trompe l’oeil* effects and to create a *papier collé*.

In what was perhaps his best-known comment about their collaboration, Picasso once said, “Braque, he is my wife!” The remark is generally seen as a compliment, a testimony to Braque’s unending patience. Yet if we recall

how Picasso treated his wives, the comment acquires new meaning. Picasso's marriages were far from being partnerships of equals; as we now know all too well, the artist was an abusive husband who eventually tired of each of his wives, and left them. And so it was with Braque. Their creative relationship was furiously one-sided. Picasso took all of Braque's ideas, everything Braque had to offer. Then, in 1913, when Picasso had drained Braque of his discoveries and pushed Cubism as far as he could, he stopped spending time with him.

Why was the carpet green? Stepping into "Pioneering Cubism" was a bit like stepping onto a golf course. Synthetic green carpet stretched before us in every direction. It isn't unusual for museums to dress up their premises for a temporary exhibition. The Metropolitan is notorious for draping its walls in red and gold fabrics that seem more fitting for a bordello than a museum. Yet richly colored walls and carpets aren't something we expect to find at the Modern. Over the years the museum has been associated with simple decor: blonde wood floors, pristine white walls, an occasional swatch of industrial gray carpet. This is appropriate. For modernism is, among other things, a renunciation of visual excess.

Nonetheless, the miles of green carpet in "Pioneering Cubism" struck me as a good idea. You might not think that the color of carpet could make any difference in the way we experience a show, but in this case it did. Significantly and peculiarly, the carpet made us realize that green was one of the more common colors in the Cubist palette.

Green? Generally when we think of Cubist compositions, we think of tans and browns and sooty grays, of weathered monochromes. Yet "Pioneering Cubism" began and ended on an unmistakably green note. Among the earliest pictures in the show were several groups of landscapes (by both of the artists) in which hills and trees are depicted as chunky blocks of green. It isn't surprising that landscapes would be green, but portraits and still lifes? *Woman with a Fan*, which Picasso painted in 1909, shows a stony female figure presiding over a jumble of dark green objects (they include her hat, her fan, and the chair she's sitting in). Braque's *Musical Instruments* of 1908, in which a green table takes up half the background, similarly surprises us with the earthiness of its tones. It's as if the two artists were trying to bring the landscape indoors. The shade of green they use most often isn't the exuberant green of the South, of Cézanne's sunny Provence. Rather, it's duskier, more expressive. It evokes the forest interiors of Delacroix, the deep, mossy tones of Courbet, the emotionalism of nineteenth-century painting.

As "Pioneering Cubism" progressed, and the heavy forms of the early years were splintered into shards, the green tonalities promptly gave way to the somber, grayed-over palette of Analytic Cubism. Yet, even in Cubism's most classical moments, patches of green can sometimes be spotted amid the

neutral browns and grays. In Braque's *Pedestal Table* (1911), for instance, a tiny, quivering rectangle of green is pinned into the lower left corner of an otherwise brown work. There's something poignant about this patch of green. In much the same way that the pedestal table of the painting's title is barely recognizable in the welter of ambiguous planes, the little green rectangle is barely noticeable among the overall tonalities of the work. As we watch it disappear into an arrangement of browns, it's as if we're watching nature itself fade from view, fade from art.

Later, after 1912, when Picasso and Braque started reintroducing color into their work, they often floated flattened-out forms against a surface of deep, glowing green. The last work in the exhibition is *Green Still Life*, and the title is fitting.

What are we to make of all this green? There are those who might argue that it allows us to see that the early compositions of Cubism could be extravagantly lush. I myself wouldn't go that far; I'm not among the critics who like to argue that Analytical Cubism is more sensual than people realize.

Still, the green does affect the way we think about Cubism – and particularly the way we think about it in relation to the landscape. Generally, Cubism is perceived as a movement that occurred indoors. When we think of Picasso and Braque, we don't think of them posted before easels in the countryside; we think of them seated at a table in their studios, with their wine glasses and playing cards and newspapers; we think of them transforming real objects into a new reality. But they didn't go all the way. Just as they couldn't bring themselves to banish completely images of people and objects from their work, they refused to dispense with the color green and the old-fashioned things it evoked for them. It's as if they felt sad about having to give up the physical world for the world of abstraction. That's what makes their work so moving.

Marcin Krol

FROM A POLISH WRITER IN NEW HAVEN

There is something strange about getting news of my country exclusively from American sources, after having been involved in its everyday political life and privy to all kinds of informed gossip in Warsaw.

Before the events in Poland and Eastern Europe became so chaotic, I accepted an invitation from Yale University to come here, as Visiting Professor in its Department of History. For several months now, I have been teaching young Americans about the ideological struggles in Russia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Since my arrival, I have followed closely the American reporting of events in Eastern Europe, not because I do not have access to other sources, but because I wanted to get a sense of the whole adventure from the American angle. So far, although I could have predicted some of the views expressed in the Western media, my impressions have led me to venture some new ones.

I read *The New York Times* and *The Christian Science Monitor* every day, and I watch various television newscasts, including Cable News Network and *The MacNeil Lehrer News Hour*, both of which do an excellent reporting job; this all amounts to taking in a lot of news. Nevertheless, there is little news of the politics of Eastern Europe. Poland and the other countries are portrayed as though they are but one bloc, and sometimes the whole of Eastern (or Central or East-Central) Europe is treated as if it were one solid entity. This is of course natural – *The New York Times* headline, “Upheaval in the East,” is but one example – and it is of course not true.

The notion of “Eastern Europe” rightly was used for decades, because under Soviet domination we Eastern Europeans had no chance to demonstrate that in reality we belong to worlds different from each other; we have different traditions, and we have responded differently to oppression. The matter of how different people react to similar deprivation was in itself not interesting to the West, where an oversimplifying attitude – that all Eastern European countries were poor, one was supposed to help them, and so on – prevailed. Now, the distinctiveness of reactions in individual Eastern European countries has given us an unprecedented opportunity to study in the field the childhood and youth of new democracies. In the West, democracy grew very slowly; in Eastern Europe the process can be likened to the kind of time-lapse photography where a flower grows from bud to bloom in a span of several seconds.

In both Poland and Hungary there are roughly fifty political parties, about six to eight of which are really serious. As these are not horse races, I do not want to speculate which country is further away from totalitarianism or closer to fuller democracy than the other; yet although both countries

started to change internally some years ago, each is now at a quite different stage of political development. In Poland, Solidarity created a feeling of national unity against the communists and then helped to create a government that is dominated by those from the former opposition. People with differing ideological backgrounds, varying viewpoints on the economy, welfare, and foreign relations have been temporarily united by the notion of the rule of law, by the need to overcome the economic crisis and the necessity of strengthening the Polish state. Soon, and I think the sooner the better, their differences are going to become a political issue. For now, their alliance at the early stages of democracy is inevitable; it may also prove salutary in the future. Perhaps Poles will learn to work together for the interest of the state, in spite of the obvious and natural political differences among them.

At this point, I feel that perhaps the Polish approach may be better than Hungary's, but I also fear the possible stabilization of the transitional alliances in Poland. The opposition in Hungary created numerous political parties and groupings before the parliamentary elections and before taking over the government. In the face of the political struggles now going on in Hungary, it is unclear what kind of coalition will be ruling the country a few weeks from now. The political dispute is strangely bitter, since it is being conducted in an institutional void. There is no "front of national anticommunist unity"; this has advantages, among them hindering the development of an anticommunist collectivism. We don't know which of these two ways toward democracy will be the better, quicker, and safer one. Yet examining particularities is surely more valuable to our understanding than are over-general speculations about the outburst of freedom in Eastern Europe.

To those who have not dismissed the future of democratic and liberal societies and who therefore do not accept Fukuyama's idea that history is finished, the problems that we Eastern Europeans have to face also may be of some practical value. It is not often that one can see history in the making, that one can, for instance, observe in detail what happens to a very strong Catholic Church during the dawn of democracy. As everyone knows, the Church in Poland has been politically beneficial as well as influential. Its status has created in its leadership understandable feelings of complacency. The majority of young people, who stand for liberal ideas, still attend Sunday Mass. We even have political parties that call themselves Christian-liberal, although from a logical and intellectual point of view such an animal has no right to exist. The Pope himself has pronounced himself to be against the socialist economy, yet he is also against a capitalist one. Polish society nearly unanimously supports a radically free market economy. The conflict between the liberal tradition and the Catholic tradition, not yet fully realized in Poland, constitutes, in my opinion, the main source of the spiritual tension that exists there.

There are at least three possible outcomes of this conflict of ideas and

attitudes. The first and least consequential would be if the Church were pushed into a relatively limited and publicly unimportant position, such as it has in Spain or Italy, and took on conservative tendencies. In the long run, the Church's position indeed may become similar to its place in France, as the strength of Catholic traditions in Poland is greatly exaggerated in our own country and abroad. We could easily have a repetition of the prewar situation: there was strong anticlerical opposition to the Church in Poland, and the Bishops declared allegiance to more or less unpleasant nationalist movements that never gained power. A second possibility is that the Church could prevail over the liberal-democratic tendencies, not likely except in the unwellcome event of general political and economic chaos. The result would be a demand for a political party that could restore order, backed by the Church and a nationalist (but not communist) military. Lastly, we may hope that the Church will live up to our expectations and fulfill the need of the new middle class for moral values; otherwise their behavior may overreach anything we have ever seen in history. The monstrosities of capitalism in early nineteenth-century Great Britain are nothing compared to what future social relations in Poland might turn out to be like. If the Church were to respond by giving a moral support and a moral dimension, by being a spiritual guide to the growth of a new capitalist economy, it would be for the first time. I have many doubts that the Church in Poland is prepared to take up this responsibility.

I could point out other Eastern European developments that are not visible in the American media, but I do not wish to be overly critical. There is, in fact, a lot of news, and who really wants or needs more? I would like therefore to raise a subject that has a more universal connotation and reveals a bit more of the general Western *Weltanschauung*. I have not counted, but I am fairly certain that at least seventy percent of all that is said and written in the West about Eastern Europe has something to do with the economy. I know that economy is important, but it is really that important? Coming from a country where Marxist thinking has practically disappeared, I tend perhaps to minimize the importance of the connections between economic growth, the development of democracy, and the well-being of a society. Being an historian of a sort, I recall that democratic or undemocratic tendencies have not been very closely connected to the political culture of a given society and that the popular notion that economic crisis gives birth to authoritarian, if not totalitarian, regimes is often untrue.

I think that the importance given to economic problems in Eastern Europe by Western observers reveals more about their own outlook than about the real problems. Once the surrealistic system of so-called socialist economy has been left behind, and people are on the path of reconstruction, much like Lincoln's after the American Civil War, the economy will take its natural course. This is not enough for the numerous Milton Friedman fol-

lowers in the West and in the East. They forget that the spirit comes before matter; the Western observers, politicians, and economists who try to make us concerned exclusively with our daily bread only impose upon us their own (perhaps unconscious) views. We do not want to accept these views because, as well as thinking they are untrue, we feel that in our situation it may be quite dangerous for our societies to do so.

Four decades of communist rule have left a wasteland, pollution, horrible apartment and office buildings, a collapsing public transportation system, virtually no telephones; the same decades have left an incomparable strength of spirit that, at least in Poland, has made changes possible. We must remember that it was this spiritual power and not the power of economic self-interest that brought down communism, and that a future without this spiritual power might become a wasteland of free-market competition. I am not an idealistic intellectual who sees nothing besides philosophy and poetry, but I do remember my Tocqueville, and I try not to forget that there are certain values that seem to me to be indispensable for a society in which I would like to live.

Western concern for human rights and the fight for them in our countries, conducted with some success as it appears, has been an enormous help. I do not exaggerate: knowing that we were not being left alone was invaluable. Yet now I detect a slightly patronizing attitude on the part of the West, that it is supposed to teach us the elementary rules of economics and induce an entrepreneurial spirit. It is true that practically every day I get a phone call from one of my friends who has left Poland and wants to do business there now; they all complain about the obstacles that still exist, about those famous telephones that don't work and those people (including some government officials) who still don't fully realize how to operate in the international financial market. Even so, the situation does not justify the Western perception that the emerging East European democracies might be troublesome newcomers to Western civilization, that we, once seen by the West as heroic freedom fighters, all now should take classes in economics and management. While this may be true, it would be a shame if Western observers ignored the lesson to be taken from the East, a lesson of how to combine a market economy with spiritual development. We in Poland have to learn the lesson ourselves, but our experiences may be useful for everyone else.

BOOKS

UNCOMMON READERS AND COMMON SENSE

THE PLEASURES OF READING IN AN IDEOLOGICAL AGE.

By Robert Alter. Simon and Schuster. \$18.95.

THE ETHICS OF READING. By J. Hillis Miller.

Columbia University Press. \$24.00.

One of the paradoxes of modern thought lies in the fact that deconstruction, a most complicated and abstruse theory, should have led to the celebration of the “common reader.” The so-called common reader has generally been the child of the left, more particularly the populist and social realist left. But in this respect, as in others, deconstruction has revealed itself to be a radical theory. There have been a number of refutations of deconstructionist claims, especially about the nature of reading, most of them by nonacademic critics, but somehow the idea of the common reader has persisted. Maybe the notion of a common reader is too deeply embedded in our culture, particularly in America, with its populist and egalitarian myths.

Two books have come out recently, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* by Robert Alter and *The Ethics of Reading* by J. Hillis Miller, on opposite sides of the controversy over deconstruction, whose very titles suggest their preoccupations. Alter’s book is excellently argued, I think, while Miller’s leaves too many questions up in the air, though my own biases entered into my reading of the two books.

Alter’s main argument against the deconstructionists’ idea of radical indeterminacy is reasonable and thorough. There is, of course, no one authoritative reading of a literary text, as the deconstructionists claim (falsely) is the position of traditional criticism. On the contrary, Alter makes the telling point that interpretation has its limits, but that some interpretations are more convincing than others, and that some are clearly unacceptable. Alter backs his views with brilliant readings of a number of works, and comes to the sensible conclusion that the truth lies between single interpretations and infinite ones.

In the course of his polemic Alter examines the view held by many deconstructionists that characters in fiction are inventions more than they are portraits drawn from “life” or “reality,” and concludes that readers, on the other hand, respond to their living more than their invented character. Alter also discusses the nature of style, structure, form, in fiction and poetry, with great ease and erudition. But his main contention is that reading is or should be a pleasure, “high fun,” as he calls it, which is something the literary theo-

rists seem to forget and do everything to prevent with their highly abstruse and almost unreadable discussions of literature in general and of specific texts.

Alter's book is a conspicuous example of discursive criticism, moving as it does with a knowledge of literary theory but with a light touch, and making his polemical points with grace and without overkill. For example, Alter counters the notion that the literary canon consists of works that have conformed to the entrenched social biases by reminding us that many of the great works in our hierarchical tradition have been adversarial and even subversive either in intention or execution. In addition, Alter cites many examples of the fact that writers, as T. S. Eliot has put it, have the literature of the past in their bones. Also, countering some of the wild interpretations of works by advocates of multiple readings, Alter provides a number of interpretations of classical texts that are plausible but are neither dogmatic nor strained. And his quotations of pompous, jargon-filled, and ideological statements by some contemporary theorists are devastating. Here is one from the French critic, Hélène Cixous, whom Alter characterizes as "at once Derridean, Freudian, and Marxist," and says, ". . . she describes the literary work in which character occurs as a 'machine of repression'." Miller quotes her further as saying, "The marketable form of literature . . . is closely related to that familiar, decipherable human sign that character claims to be." On the whole, Alter has restored literary theory and literary criticism to a place closer to the experience of literature.

J. Hillis Miller, on the other hand, provides a ready-made illustration of everything Alter says is inimical to the reading and the study of literature. Here I must confess to some of my own difficulty in grasping Miller's tortuous prose. However, if I understand him correctly, he appears to be developing the idea that both reading and writing are ethical acts. But by this he does not mean the commonly accepted notion of moral behavior, though at times he does lean in that direction. What he refers to as ethics, or "ethicity" as he calls it, a term apparently taken from Derrida, is doing, which in his scheme includes the act of reading and of writing. In this connection, Miller cites a remark by Henry James that life consists of doing, endless doing, which Miller further takes to support a basic tenet of deconstruction, according to which all activity, all meanings, all interpretations are endlessly varied, complex, unexpected. James's observation may be true, but just what it means for the interpretation of any piece of writing is another matter. Miller also says critics of deconstruction simplify and distort it: he denies that they believe any interpretation is possible or that they ignore the context of literary works. But his main thrust is in the direction of the multiplicity and indeterminacy of meanings. In general, Miller does not go into the nature of the "reader," but the idea of a "common reader" is implicit in his conception of the ethics of reading.

Miller pursues his thesis through chapters on Kant, Trollope, George

Eliot, Henry James, Walter Benjamin, and Paul de Man. But while the line of deconstruction, the line of relative and variable meanings, runs throughout the entire text, one is constantly thrown off balance by apparent contradictions. Moreover, the contradictions are veiled in a prose that is tantalizingly obscure and ambiguous. It is as though Miller's book is itself a showcase of different meanings – all operating simultaneously. Thus he talks a good deal about the morality of literature, particularly in relation to George Eliot. But he never lets go of the primacy of language. Similarly, Miller refers to the mimetic, the realistic quality of fiction, but he immediately repeals this common idea by emphasizing the revision that takes place in the mind of the writer. In the chapter on Henry James and Walter Benjamin, he also emphasizes the unknown essence behind writing, which is, according to him, “translated into the actual literary texts, and then retranslated when rendered into another language.” He seems to be trying to deconstruct some of the more accepted critical views to bring them into the orbit of deconstruction theory itself.

In the heat of the controversy over deconstruction, we tend to forget that many poems and parts of poems and the greater part of most narratives are clear and unambiguous. It is only in some poems and lines of poetry and when we dig deeper into characters and events that there is room for alternative meanings. Indeed, one of the requirements of literary theorizing is that the issue of interpretation be blown up. It would also seem that the question of the relation of literature to something called “Life” or “Reality” is unduly complicated by literary theorists. For, patently, characters and their fates have their origin in observation and mimesis, but these are shaped and twisted by the special and sometimes obsessive views of the authors. An even more crucial issue for literary theory is that of the nature of the reader.

Both Alter and Miller seem to have a general reader in mind, and indeed most contemporary theorists and critics appear to postulate a reader, as it were, in the abstract, who is then thought of as a common reader. Some critics go so far as to designate this reader as the ideal creation of a democratic culture. This conception I think can be dismissed as a radical piety, a hortatory notion born of populist and misguided socialist thinking. And I suspect that even many of those literary theorists who do not see the reader as a triumph of democratic culture, who indeed, are open or closet elitists, invent the so-called common reader to conceal the fact that they are really talking about the uncommon reader. For the learned and intricate interpretations that most theorists and academic critics go in for are clearly addressed to advanced students of literature.

I cannot claim that my views about reading are based on any scientific evidence, but many years of teaching and observing the reading habits of untrained readers have convinced me that if there is such a creature as a common reader, he or she reads for the immediate and obvious flow and meaning of a story, unencumbered by the possibilities of recessed meanings

of the kind unearthed by diligent scholars. Furthermore, it is largely the classics that are subjected to both the theory and practice of endless interpretations, while what the common reader reads are usually contemporary and popular works of fiction. And these are read for what most critics consider to be pleasure, not for profound meanings. But here too many distinctions have to be made between sophisticated and unsophisticated readers, and between the alleged pleasure of both these groups and that of writers on the one hand and academics on the other.

I am not aware of any satisfactory studies of the way people read. There is Norman Holland's book, *The Dynamics of Literary Response*, but it is mostly an exercise in the psychology of reading. My own experience leads me to believe that most students who do not have a literary bent or ambition and most "common" readers read either for escape or because of absorption in the story. Furthermore, they are influenced by television and popular reviewing which narrow the gap between life and literature. They tend to react to the story and to judge the characters the same way they relate to people they know, and to popular notions about "life," sometimes going so far as to try to rewrite the story in their minds to correspond to their own experience. This is not to deny that they get satisfaction from their reading, but it is one that is distinguishable from other kinds of reading.

The reading of scholars and of writers is more complicated. Many literary theorists, for example, often leave the text to pursue the logic of their theoretical assumptions. The deconstructionists in particular are engaged in philosophical definitions and speculations that take place at some distance from the experience of writing, and even of reading by sophisticated readers. Writers, on the other hand, read other writers, particularly the classics, to grasp the nature of the experience that went into their writing and to observe the conversion of that experience into fiction. Both novelists and critics read books in terms of their own writing. Thus literary critics and writers are professional readers, and their pleasure is probably a combination of professional concerns, and an immersion in a high level of performance, in addition to the simple enjoyment not too different from that of an untrained reader. But theorists differ from writers in that the former convert literature into theory while the latter convert theory into literature.

Thus, though there are no absolute distinctions between the different kinds of readers, there is clearly some difference at least in emphasis between professional and unprofessional readers. Deconstruction, for example, is aimed principally at readers who are interested primarily in theories of literature. The "common reader," if he exists, is the object of a more practical type of criticism, that emphasizes the experience of literature and is more interested in the quality of writing than its hidden meanings. But such critics, as distinguished from theorists, are, I am afraid, an endangered species.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

THE HOLOCAUST IN THE ACADEMY

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS. NAZI GERMANY AND THE GENOCIDE OF THE JEWS. Edited by François Furet.

Schocken Books. \$24.95.

WHY DID THE HEAVENS NOT DARKEN? THE "FINAL SOLUTION" IN HISTORY. By Arno Mayer. Pantheon. \$27.95.

I thought *Shoah* was a thoughtful rendition of the Holocaust – until a survivor of Auschwitz told me that it didn't at all depict how awful it really was. And I considered the scholarship on the Holocaust one of the most serious and thoughtful enterprises – until reading these two books, one after the other. For I was not aware to what extent the Holocaust has become an academic subject, full of data, statistics and facts that, except in rare instances, leave out the suffering of the men, women and children who died. None of these numbers could recreate for me the dread of knowing, for example, exactly what happened to all my grandparents, my father's brother, my mother's sister, my cousin: were they shot in Riga, marched to Auschwitz, put to work before being gassed?

Although such is the problem of all historical writing, brought on by the need of turning corpses into statistics, I was put off by the emphasis on and the disagreements over, for instance, the exact moment the "final solution" was decided upon. I do not mean to imply that we ought not to know whether, as Lucy Dawidowicz maintains, it was the culmination of a grand design foreshadowed in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, or whether it was made by Hitler himself, by Heidrich or Himmler, but that the centrality of such details elevates the scholarship over the enormity of the occurrence. The somewhat exaggerated objectivity became particularly apparent to me when reading one of the more peripheral essays in Furet's volume, "Theological Interpretations of the Holocaust" by Amos Finkelstein who quoted Primo Levi:

There comes to light the existence of two particularly well-differentiated categories among men – the saved and the drowned. Other pairs of opposites (the good and the bad, the wise and the foolish, the cowards and the courageous, the unlucky and the fortunate) are considerably less distinct, they seem less essential, and above all they allow for more numerous and complex intermediary gradations. . . . In the Lager things are different: here the struggle to survive is without respite, because everyone is desperately and ferociously alone.

In other words, Holocaust historians, for better or worse, delve into data culled from archives to come up with interpretations and counterinterpretations that tend to leave out the experiences of the victims.

In the first contribution to François Furet's Holocaust reader, a collection of articles by the foremost experts on the subject who met in Paris in 1982, Saul Friedländer begins by stating that historians proceed from two opposing premises. They believe, with Isaac Deutscher, that the Holocaust of the Jews was an absolutely unique event and thus cannot be properly understood. Or they follow Raymond Aron (who planned the conference before his death) in holding that the genocide was not irrational; that, if one admits that Hitler's primary aim was the liquidation of the Jews, of "the Jewish poison," then the men and the means of transportation needed for this end had to be diverted even from the armed forces. The global explanations of the Holocaust, states Friedländer, place German anti-Semitism or "*völkisch*" thinking into historical perspective, perceive it as part of the national or racial ideology; some of these studies proceed from Marxist assumptions to interpretations of fascism and/or totalitarianism, others compare the Nazis' anti-Semitism to those of Italian fascists toward Africans and Slavs. Concrete interpretations, Friedländer explains, may be "intentionalist" (there is a direct relationship between ideology, planning and policy) or "functionalists" (decisions are linked to specific contexts and are made almost *ad hoc*, often by loyal lieutenants who second-guess their führer.)

I do not mean to underestimate the work and dedication that went into any of the researches, although some are more speculative than others. But even though it is easy enough to dismiss "revisionist" historians such as Faurisson and Rassinier, as Pierre Vidal-Naquet demonstrates in his essay, many other contributions as well clearly point to biases coming from historians' specific political beliefs.

Arno Mayer's *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, though an informative *tour de force*, is one of the cleverest and most erudite revisionist histories. As a latecomer to Holocaust studies, Mayer is able to draw on the massive research of his colleagues. Some of the reviewers have faulted him for not footnoting his sources, although for the most part they have praised or censured him in line with their own political stances.

In his preface, Mayer states that instead of reappraising and historicizing the Judeocide (his word for the Holocaust) one must "abandon the vantage point of the Cold War," place it in its "pertinent historical setting," and use an "overarching interpretive construct" to explain the horrors of the Jewish catastrophe in the context of historical circumstances. To this end, he begins by analyzing the interests of the elites who, despite their strong reservations, helped Hitler get into power and later on backed his military drive for *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe; he traces within Nazi ideology the

interconnections and fusions of anticommunism with anti-Semitism from *Mein Kampf* to 1945; he subordinates the Nazis' mounting persecution of the Jews to their increasing frustration at losing the war to the hated Bolsheviks; and he perceives "the mass slaughter of the Jews . . . as an integral part of an enormous historical convulsion, [as] the foremost but by no means the only victims . . . [of] the ultimate horror and atrocity in an exceptionally violent and savage half century." To be more precise, Mayer postulates the period from 1914 to 1945 as a thirty-year war, similar to the Thirty Years War of the seventeenth century. Then too, maintains Mayer, civil and political society, intellectual and cultural life were in crisis, and religion contributed to the singular destructiveness and ferocity of that war. By recounting that at that time about a million men died in battle or from battle wounds and eight million from famine, and that this was a larger percentage of the population than succumbed to the Nazis' fanaticism against "Judeo-Bolshevism," he manages to relativize Hitler's genocide of the Jews, which many consider a unique event.

According to Mayer, the Nazis' "anti-Semitism was one of several central creeds of an essentially syncretic ideology, the others being social Darwinism, the geopolitics of eastern expansionism and anti-Marxism." Anti-Semitism became ever more ferocious, he argues, with the progression of the war against the Soviet Union, when with the conquest of Poland, and later of Soviet territories, more and more Jews came under German control, most of them unassimilated, unacculturated, and poor. Mayer supplies the gruesome facts and statistics (although in less detail than Raul Hilberg in *Unanswered Questions*) about the roundups, the transports, and the various types of deaths in the extermination camps. But Mayer's thesis will hold or fall on some of these "details," such as, for instance, the date of the order to exterminate the Jews.

The decision concerning the Final Solution, states Christopher Browning in *Unanswered Questions*, is a matter of probability rather than certainty: there are no written records, and Hitler, Himmler, and Heidrich all died. One can only extrapolate from events, documents and testimony by people who were not central. Browning demonstrates (by means of documents and testimony) that Hitler's virulent anti-Semitism did not include plans for the Final Solution until 1941, that there were a series of decisions taken during that year – in the spring to murder the Russian Jews who would fall into German hands during the coming invasion and in the summer to extend the killing process to all European Jews. He refers to documents of October 1941, to meetings of euthanasia experts with Eichmann and Heidrich, which go into the difficulties of rail transportation to Siberia, into the impending death of millions of people through starvation. He documents the Nazis' pervasive attempts to keep these plans secret – which contributed to the fact

that no one spelled out the final means to reach the Final Solution. Still, Browning proves that when Heidrich, in November 1941, invited the participants to the Wannsee Conference which took place in January 1942 to coordinate the actual plans, he sent along a copy of Göring's July 31st authorization.

Mayer, however, contends that the anti-Jewish furor was closely related to the war, and that it intensified after the race to Moscow that fall (called operation "Barbarossa" and based on the expansionist, millennial ideology of the Third Reich) miscarried in December 1941. And he holds that "the Nazi fanatics fastened upon the Jews as the most reachable and vulnerable incarnation of 'Judeo-bolshevism' *after* their first major defeat. Had the course of the war turned in favor of the Germans, I wonder, would they then have stopped the systematic starvation of Jews, the forced labor, and the process of extermination? Or, as Mayer infers, would they have desisted and arranged for transportation to Madagascar if the French had agreed to give up this colony for the resettlement of the Jews? These are just a few of the many moot questions. But even if fewer Jews had been exterminated, Hitler's and the other Nazi leader's obsession with ridding the world of all Jews would not have let up, as Mayer shows by concluding his book with Hitler's last ravings against the Jews. Thus Mayer seems to contradict his own central argument – that Hitler primarily was fighting Bolshevism and that the Jews were the "all-purpose scapegoats . . . the victims of the vengeful fury generated in the course of a monstrous and disastrous 'holy war'."

Both Mayer's and Furet's books are based on solid, historical research. But the breakdown of killings into tens or hundreds of thousands – by starvation, shooting, cremation, gassing, and on the various war fronts – points to the dehumanizing elements pervasive in *all* of Holocaust history. Of course, this is how objective history must be written. But it leaves out the distress, the agonies each of these millions must have experienced and which the survivors continue to live with. My mother, for instance, who barely managed to catch the last boat leaving Italy for America in 1940, waited until last year to show me three unopened letters she had sent to her mother who was still in Vienna, in November and December 1941: the handwriting on the back of the first one said "Return to Sender. *Nach Polen abgereist*." On the others, a similar message already was stamped.

Questions of the German population's "guilt," of course, must remain speculative. Still, how could the postal employees in the Third Reich not wonder where all these Jews without forwarding addresses had travelled to? How much did the railway employees (who directed regular as well as special trains) really know? Were they suspicious when they saw so many miserable people in cattle cars as they passed them to be loaded under the noses of SS guards carrying guns and sticks?

We will never know just how many Germans and Austrians were glad to benefit from the removal of the Jews, from the confiscation of their property. But we do know that former Socialists and Communists who might have wanted to resist did not and could not do so once the killing machinery was in place. Had they objected, the Nazi leaders who never lacked the manpower to service these machines would have “processed” them as well. And we also know that however many people may have perished during “the first Thirty Years War,” or during any other war, however ideological and gruesome it might have been, that there is a qualitative difference between dying on a battle field and being transported to a killing field or a crematorium.

EDITH KURZWEIL

THE MAKING OF AN HISTORIAN

FROM THAT TIME AND THAT PLACE. By Lucy Dawidowicz.
W. W. Norton Co. \$21.95.

Leon Edel has described *From That Time and That Place* as “deeply felt and soberly narrated,” a judgement any intelligent reading of Lucy Dawidowicz’s recent book cannot but sustain. All the same, I have a certain difficulty with the qualifier “soberly,” though I cannot say it is incorrect or imprecise to any degree. Lucy Dawidowicz’s memoir of her stay in the ghetto city of Vilna is indeed soberly narrated; there are in it no purple passages; her prose is sturdy, clear, and always to the point. And yet . . . the whole thing comes off like a poem; it is in a way a love song to the Jewish inhabitants of Vilna who were destroyed in the Holocaust, reminding me, for one, of Jehuda Halevi’s poems of love for Jerusalem. He, the greatest poet in Hebrew between David and Bialik, celebrated the city he loved but had not seen. Finally, he was able to journey to Palestine and see the city of his dreams. He was slain, before its walls, by an Arab.

Lucy Dawidowicz could not have had any special feelings about Vilna before she visited it. Her aim in going there on a stipend from YIVO in 1938, with Europe on the verge of war, was to find out for herself what it was like to live in a Jewish community, where the great tormenting questions

of the day concerning war and peace, race, dictatorship and democracy were being discussed in Yiddish. Sojourning in Vilna, she came to love much of it (though she was not unaware that the Jewish way of life one could still lead in the ghetto rested on a rotten foundation). Had she remained in Vilna for even one more week in September 1939, she might have paid with her life for having visited the ghetto city, as Halevi paid with his just to behold Jerusalem. To point out the comparison, let me cite this fact which I take from the author's text: Napoleon once dubbed Vilna the Jerusalem of Lithuania.

So there is something romantic about this book which some of its reviewers missed. This memoir is the story of a quest, of the author's search for her real identity, and in a place where people spoke Yiddish all of the time, not once in a while as her parents had done in New York. And it was in Vilna that she first began to formulate somewhat vaguely what her field of study was to be. With hostilities still in the wings, and the Jews of Eastern Europe still in their homes, shops, and shuls, she was preparing herself to write the story of their destruction: *The War Against the Jews*.

With a scholar's knowledge of Eastern Europe's Jewry which I simply cannot match, and also a scholar's nagging impulse to find faults others have not seen (a trait I am rather glad I do not have), David G. Roskies, in his review of the book (*The New Republic*, July 10, 1989), begins by listing the itinerary "for Jewish travellers in the Polish city of Vilna in 1939." The list, covering places of historic interest, corresponds rather closely to the very places in Vilna Dawidowicz took care to see and study, but on the regular itinerary Roskies has chosen (for some reason or other) to cite, these places are located in what Max Scheler in a great word called "heartless space"; in the author's text these same spots are in a very different space, where her heart sometimes told her she was at last at home.

Certainly she did not fully understand when she visited Vilna why she had gone there. Roskies has it thus:

A red-diaper baby who precociously lost her faith in Stalin, the young Dawidowicz was trying to reclaim what little was left of American Yiddish culture once its radical politics had been stripped away. If she couldn't believe in the Yiddish revolutionary paradise, the only thing left was the dream of forging a new, Jewish-language culture on the foundations of the old.

The banality of this explanation tells us more about Roskies than about Dawidowicz. And I must note here, that it is perfectly proper to explain a person's past actions in the light of future deeds, as Merleau-Ponty did with Cézanne, citing the latter's late paintings as the reason for his early oddities of

psychology and perception. I would similarly suggest that Lucy went to Vilna in order to find a Jewish destiny. Her motive was warm, not the chill one made still colder in Roskies's prose.

"I had come to Vilna for its Jewish history," writes Dawidowicz, but she recounts – and sometimes this has a comical effect – activities she pursued which had little to do with the culture she was trying to understand. Certainly it had little relation to the American films she saw in Vilna: Bette Davis in *Jezebel*, Greta Garbo in *Camille*. And there was little of the ultimate meaning she sought in the routine she followed. Here is how she describes it:

I'd get up about eight, shiver through my cold-water wash, dress, breakfast, and read the papers . . . Then I'd walk to YIVO. I generally did my own research in the morning or had some tutoring in Yiddish.

All this time Europe was exploding. There was the Czech crisis, then came Munich, the fall of the Spanish Republic, and then the Hitler-Stalin pact. As Dawidowicz puts it:

. . . the present became more compelling than the past bringing new dangers of war and intimations of disaster. It was as though we were held in an ever-tightening vise from which we would never escape.

She did escape, one week before war was declared, but she understood that the people she had lived among would not. Almost every one of them, including the Kalmanoviches, who took her in as one of their family, are dead.

How are we to judge this memoir? Certain Jewish writers of this century have made extraordinary efforts to redefine the meaning they could give to the fact that they were Jews, I might almost say to reinvent their Jewishness. Martin Buber, born of a Jewish family in Germany and educated in the very best German schools, did that thing unheard of among German Jews of the middle class: he studied Yiddish and translated into German the tales of the Hassidim. Gershom Scholem did something just as extraordinary: he practically reinvented the Kabbala, and along with it the history of the Jews. Lucy Dawidowicz did something comparable, though hardly as memorable. In 1938 she went off on a tiny YIVO fellowship to the doomed ghetto of Vilna – Mr. Roskies has the coarseness to call her so doing "bad timing geopolitically." In my view her trip was perfectly timed to begin her destiny, which as we all now know was to describe the destruction of the East European Jews.

LIONEL ABEL

RETHINKING THE REVOLUTION

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. By J. F. Boshier.

W. W. Norton & Co. \$24.95.

By any criterion, the French Revolution is one of the great events of human history. But what exactly is its significance? A number of standard or plausible interpretations are available. It was the implementation of the Enlightenment: in the course of the eighteenth century, inspired by the Scientific Revolution, a set of thinkers had elaborated a secular, naturalistic, empiricist, and materialist vision of the world and of its social corollaries, thus undermining the hierarchical conception both of the cosmos and of society. The French Revolution then attempted to carry out their program. Alternatively, it was a major episode in the long story of the centralization of France and of the equalization of conditions, a development initiated long ago in the Middle Ages. Or again, it was the victory of the bourgeoisie over feudal privilege and/or monarchical absolutism. Or it could be the very first of the third world *revolutions de rattrapage*: if, in the early nineteenth century, the third world began on the Rhine, then in the eighteenth it had been located on the English Channel. A new social order had emerged in England and had demonstrated its superiority, and, for all its universalistic rhetoric, the transformation really had the rather specific aim of keeping up with the Anglo-Saxons. (Oswald Spengler's complaint was that the French revolutionary armies, while nominally fighting the English, were in reality spreading English ideas throughout the Continent.) It can be seen as the culmination of the Rationalist disease, which would have society based not on custom but on abstraction; or as the beginning of that trend towards democratic totalitarianism which was to find its culmination in our age. No doubt there are many others.

Boshier's approach to the Revolution is that of an historian proper rather than of a philosopher (in modern parlance, a macrosociologist). He is skeptical concerning the validity of any single interpretation of the event, and he follows Alfred Cobban in the view that not merely is there no single meaning, but there is not even any one single event which could be the carrier of that meaning. There cannot be a single interpretation, because there is a whole series of complex events to be interpreted. Boshier further strengthens such a view by the argument that the Revolution had not been intended or planned. He asks, "... where in the prerevolutionary years are

the ideas of nationalism, of republicanism . . . of democracy . . . and the other guiding ideas of the Revolution?" Against the ideological or philosophical approach, he affirms: "Anyone who approaches the subject with scientific doubt and detachment, however, may find a generation of revolutionaries whose deeds were not premeditated and a series of events that do not seem inevitable."

This sense of complexity and contingency, and the distrust of the unifying formulae, comes naturally to many historians (if indeed it is not part of their professional training), and it carries the authority of their intimate familiarity with the facts. All the same, I am far from convinced. I do not dispute the absence of specific and concrete premeditation – a feeling which markedly distinguished the French from the Russian Revolution – though I would distinguish, with more emphasis than can be found in Boshier's presentation, the issue of premeditation from that of inevitability: the Revolution might have been unpremeditated yet inevitable, and it might have been planned and yet *not* inevitable.

The crucial point seems to me this: the world we live in now, two hundred years after the Revolution, is, in its manner of sustaining itself, in its political organization, in its ideology, radically discontinuous from the world in which the Revolution occurred. This fundamental transformation is probably our single most important datum, from which all our social thought must proceed. The Revolution was, though not the prime mover, at any rate the attempt to work out, codify, implement the new order, as it was then understood. It is unquestionably a milestone on the highway of world history. To say that it is, essentially, but an assemblage of heterogeneous, complex, contingent, and uncoordinated events, is probably true, and certainly far less than the whole truth.

Boshier gives us a good summary of what the Revolution has done to France, but he says fairly little about what it has done to the world, as if to punish the French for their nationalist vainglory (on which he comments), their tendency to turn world history into little more than a backcloth for the history of France. In restricting his focus to France in this way, he tries to turn the tables on Michelet, for instance. Yet although world history is not French history writ large, the French Revolution *is* part of world history.

The bicentennial of the French Revolution coincided with the ascendancy of the Soviet *perestroika*, in effect a partial effort to dismantle the Russian Revolution, which itself was meant to complete the work of the French Revolution. The Bolsheviks were Jacobins *with* premeditation, ardent students of the most serious and sustained theoretical effort to think through the French Revolution and to correct its deficiencies. Boshier seems on the whole to accept the left-wing view of the Revolution as a task left uncompleted, because it failed to incorporate 'the people': "The greatest task during the two centuries since the Revolution has been to bring the urban populace

and the peasantry into the national polity . . . ” Marxism thought it knew both how to do it and why it had not been done, and could not be done, the first time around.

In France, after two centuries of relative instability (Bosher counts sixteen constitutions and notes, with fine irony, that constitution-writing is a distinctive branch of French literature), the task has in fact been completed: at any rate, the deep chasm between ‘the public’ and ‘the populace’ has now been eroded. There is no longer an alien populace, bloodthirsty both in support and in opposition of Revolutionary principles, and needing to be drowned in blood if it is to be controlled. The last reenactment of the Revolution, in 1968, was almost pure psychodrama, with the dead being countable on the fingers of one hand. Just how this was achieved no one quite knows; late industrial affluence most clearly had a great deal to do with it.

The principles of the French Revolution have ceased to be contentious or septic in France: *quatorze juillet* is simply the day on which one finally leaves Paris to go to the *côte*. It is in Russia that the themes which pervade Bosher’s account are resonant, crucial, loaded with uncertainty and tension, pregnant with good and evil possibilities. The categories which Bosher says he finds more useful than ‘class’ or other sophisticated notions, namely *public* and *populace*, are still in use, *nur mit ein bisschen anderen Worten*, in Russia. Bosher thinks that in France, the victory of the Dreyfusards marks the conversion of the *populace* to the principles of the French Revolution. By the same token, he should be more worried by the abandonment of those principles by the *public* when it endorsed, as he admits, Pétain and Vichy.

In Russia, an enlightened *public* is now eager to secure accountable and law-bound government from authorities not too disinclined to grant them (in this respect resembling Bosher’s account of Louis XVI); but both partners in this dialogue, however, are afraid of what may happen if the *populace* really takes part. In Russia, the public is known as the *intelligents*, the populace as *narod*. It is the most deeply felt distinction in Russian society. The past record of the populace is as bloody as that of its French counterpart. No one knows its real present mood: does it yearn to tear its betters to pieces, both for having perpetrated the Revolution *and* for now wishing to soften and reform it? Or has it, on the contrary, quietly come to resemble its *present* French counterpart, and does it crave stability above all things, so as to enable it to enjoy its benefits (great in comparison with the past, even if small in comparison with the West)? No one really knows: big decisions are made on the basis of guesswork concerning this issue. The *perestroichiks* would push harder if they were not, like their predecessors the *philosophes*, scared stiff of the *people*.

So the issues of the French Revolution are still with us, but are no longer being played out in France. Bosher, while rightly rebuking the French for their insularity, largely restricts his discussion to intra-*hexagone* matters.

One could argue with him on some points of detail. For instance, in connection with the question of French economic development, he initially quotes, with evident approval, the claim that “in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, France was the greatest industrial power in the world.” Later on, however, he repudiates the “left-wing myth” of a bourgeois domination of France. After the Revolution, “land remained the main force of wealth . . . the ruling elites were composed more of landowners than businessmen or financiers well into the twentieth century . . . most manufacturing in France was done in small workshops until well into the twentieth century.” Perhaps it is possible for a country to be the leading industrial power in the eighteenth century, and also to be industrially retarded at the beginning of the twentieth. Yet this would seem to call for some discussion. If true, it would suggest that the Revolution was an agent of economic retardation – an original interpretation indeed.

Bosher eschews and derides general interpretations, on the grounds that those who propound them also wish to impose them on their listeners and to inhibit thought. However, not all of us theorists are also dogmatists. Bosher wishes to make us think: with the help of a rich assembly of facts, lucid prose, and critical discussion of theories he repudiates, he certainly succeeds. He helps one rethink those general ideas which he so distrusts. This is an enjoyable and stimulating book.

ERNEST GELLNER

SUCH WERE THE JOYS

NEW YORK: CULTURE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD, 1940-1965.

Edited by Leonard Wallock. Rizzoli. \$65.00.

With its hyperbolic title and lavish illustrations – more than three hundred of them, including eighty in color – this volume comes to us cunningly disguised as a coffee-table book. In fact it’s a shrewd, useful, often brilliant collective portrait of a period that’s coming to be seen as a golden age in New York’s cultural life. Impressively, over half the contributors are younger scholars who at most have a hazy memory of the postwar years. None are tempted by a neoconservative nostalgia for the stable, untroubled, hierarchical world that we supposedly enjoyed before the disruptions of the late sixties. Yet their aim, like that of some revisionist historians, is to recover the cultural achievements of New York in the forties and fifties, including those

buried by the uproar of the succeeding decades.

The editor, Leonard Wallock, who contributes a perceptive historical essay on the period, commissioned articles on literature, architecture, the visual arts, dance, the theater, music, and the intellectual life by seasoned critics such as Dore Ashton and Richard Gilman, as well as younger writers including Alexander Bloom, Lynn Garafola, Carol Herselle Krinsky, John Rockwell, and William Sharpe. The better essays aim to put the period into some longer perspective, not just to chronicle its brighter moments. Inevitably, the writers sometimes exaggerate the era's successes, or simply string them together like so many beads on a necklace, a common vice of this kind of cultural history. From the editor we hear once too often about New York as the "Megalopolis," and the other contributors are fond of evoking "explosions" of creativity in the language of journalistic shorthand and publicity hype.

The opening sentence of the editor's introduction, echoed by the jacket copy, is an example of this sort of booster mentality: "Skyscrapers and swing, action painting and modern dance, Beat poetry and Pop art, *Partisan Review* and *West Side Story*, the Living Theatre and the Guggenheim Museum: if Paris was, in Walter Benjamin's famous phrase, 'the capital of the nineteenth century,' then New York has surely become the capital of the twentieth."

This is not so much false as overheated and indiscriminating. Apart from the catchy alliteration, what do skyscrapers and swing have in common, except that they vaguely belonged to the same period? Why link a highbrow journal like *Partisan Review*, which had little use for Broadway in any form, with a sensational Broadway musical based on *Romeo and Juliet*? Is there some parallel or contrast between the avant-garde theater troupe and Frank Lloyd Wright's daringly unconventional museum? In fact, none of these things has any connection whatever; they simply suit the time-frame and the celebratory tenor of the volume.

One contributor, well known for his astringent drama criticism, dissents sharply from the golden age motif. Richard Gilman remarks that "the years 1940 to 1965 make up an extremely imprecise designation, to be employed only for the sake of an argument," and he adds acerbically that "there have been no truly glorious epochs in the history of the stage in America when compared to Europe." Gilman goes on to dismiss the once-respected plays of Robert Anderson, John Van Druten, Paddy Chayefsky, William Inge, and William Gibson in a sentence or two, allowing Arthur Miller only a qualified nod for "his one enduring drama." He saves his imprimatur for the musical theater and the beginnings of off-Broadway drama with Jack Gelber's *The Connection*.

Even Gilman admits that "if it was not a Golden Age . . . it was far from being a dark one." What was the key to the liveliness of the arts during

this quarter of a century? The answer must be found not simply in what was happening in New York but in the country as a whole, for the history of the arts in New York during this period was, to a remarkable degree, the story of the arts in America. The booming prosperity and domestic tranquility of the United States after the war contributed to the boom in culture, partly as an ornament of wealth and power, partly as an object of leisure and self-enhancement. This was not the politicized culture of the 1930s, with its inward-looking regionalism and homespun Americanism. It was a far more cosmopolitan culture that suited America's new activism and influence on the world stage, a culture flaunting its own succession to the great European art of the past.

Because of its throngs of immigrants and its links to Europe, New York had always been seen by the heartland as a vaguely un-American city, a den of urban sin and sophistication – at the same time foreigners saw it as the epitome of American dynamism, modernity, and ethnic pluralism. The influx of emigré artists and intellectuals added to the city's cosmopolitan atmosphere at a time when the country was gradually ending its isolation. The regionalists and populists of the thirties, including composers like Aaron Copland, dancers like Martha Graham, novelists like John Steinbeck, and painters like Thomas Hart Benton and the government-sponsored muralists, were looking to create a distinctively American art. Above all they were looking for recognizably American subjects, especially rural subjects like the farm and the frontier. By contrast the cosmopolitans of the forties, retreating from overt political themes, renouncing naturalism, took up the lost links with European modernism and abstraction that were first forged by American expatriates in the 1920s.

The new art of the forties was often an abstract art, urban in its forms and rhythms rather than in its subject matter. "Most ambitious painters had disembarassed themselves of specific city imagery by 1950," writes Dore Ashton in her superb essay on the art of the period, "but the spirit of the city, with its chaotic masses and unpredictable events, informed their work." Just as Pollock, Kline, and de Kooning made painting more purely gestural, George Balanchine and Merce Cunningham made movement itself the subject of the dance. Grounded in the classic traditions of Russian ballet, says Lynn Garafola, "Each season, scissors in hand, Balanchine snipped away at the decorative appendages, until, by 1951, with the scenery gone and the dancers dressed in leotards, he had bared the very bones of his choreography."

But to see these works in terms of "the spirit of the city" is an argument from an analogy that can look like special pleading. Thus Ashton remarks of de Kooning's very busy 1950 painting, *Excavation*, that "many commentators saw analogues with the city's hectic rhythms in both its organic and geometric shapes and in its densely populated surfaces. Although de

Kooning's *Excavation* contains no specific reference to the urban environment, it reflects the discord and chaos of the city." Similarly, Garafola says of the "leotard" ballets: "Balanchine laid bare the anguish of sexual relationships and the ambiguity of sexual identity. With their chance encounters, mechanical pleasures, calculated seductions, and abrupt departures, his matings belong to the lore of the city."

Poststructuralist critics might argue that Ashton's and Garafola's social interpretations are circular and tenuous: looking for urban themes in the work of New York painters and choreographers, they find them, if only by inference or suggestion. Yet this is precisely what makes their essays so valuable. Instead of simply cataloguing the painting and ballet of the period – the two arts which, along with jazz, truly put New York culture on the world map in the late forties – they show how the city rhythm worked its way into the art itself, its forms, its materials and deep structures. These intrepid critics have the courage of their intuitions. They understand that all interpretation is metaphoric, even allegorical – a leap from the work of art to some frame of meaning. They insist that even abstract art has a profound if elusive social basis. Their work demonstrates how all criticism is a form of cultural history.

When Ashton deals with the sculpture of David Smith or Louise Bourgeois, or with Pop Art, or with the "assemblages" of Claes Oldenburg (like "The Store," 1960), her way of 'reading' the social subtext seems fully justified. With their found materials, Smith, Rauschenberg, and Oldenburg incorporated the endless bric-à-brac of city life, the waste and detritus of urban living, into their work, just as Frank O'Hara integrated the spontaneous urban moment into his casual-seeming poetry.

One of the great strengths of the city was (and still is) the sheer mass of artists occupying the same spaces – the Village, Soho, the Lower East Side – going to the same bars, galleries, poetry readings, and jazz clubs, seeing the same little magazines. This has not only engendered groups and cliques of like-minded friends – the New York poets, the Abstract Expressionists, the New York intellectuals – but also incited remarkable crossings between the arts, between the Beats and some jazz performers, between New York painters and poets, choreographers and composers, choreographers and set designers, between certain painters and the intellectuals who famously theorized their work. Writers and painters can work alone, though they also may thrive in the kind of communal environment that supports experimentation. Performance, on the other hand, is nearly always collaborative; the mixed-media avant garde of the postwar years was something New York alone made possible.

Cultural crossover is one of the themes of John Rockwell's exemplary essay, which is virtually a history of New York's musical life over the last century and a half. To Rockwell, who writes strongly about both the pop scene and classical music, New York is the kind of city that could produce, out

of the ferment of its immigrant life, a Gershwin who bridged the gaps between the Broadway stage, the concert hall, Tin Pan Alley, and the opera house, between pop, classical, and jazz, between the white man's music and the black man's music.

But Rockwell also shows how the institutional side of New York's musical life, with its concentrations of commercial power and social snobbery, could become "intractably conservative." On the classical side, a few agents, concert managers, and recording executives long exercised a virtual dictatorship, with "audiences and impressarios focused firmly on Europe and the past." During the same period, before the rock revolution, all of American popular music was dominated by a "standardized and homogenized vernacular culture imposed from Manhattan."

Because of New York's virtual monopoly in recording, broadcasting, and publishing, Rockwell pays close attention to the city's role in disseminating culture as well as inspiring it. While New York's power as a communications center is virtually undiminished today, its creative position is challenged by other cities that cultivate the arts for many of the same reasons New York did – as an adjunct to their economic growth, a ratification of their cultural status, and an adornment to their leisure. In the last quarter of a century, the universities' growing love affair with the arts and the federal endowments' faith in regionalism have conspired to spread high culture dramatically through much of the once-philistine heartland. Some of this is thin and timid stuff, some real patronage of the avant garde. Still, there are now regional theaters, dance companies, symphony orchestras, and academic arts programs scattered all across the United States, catering to a more educated, more sophisticated, more dispersed audience.

Though reputations are still made in the big city, the cost of living has driven writers, artists, and performers from New York along with some of their audience. Though there are said to be some 60,000 artists now working in New York, the trendy character of the art scene, the endless hunger for the new, has turned the art world into an investment business, and transformed some of the art itself from a creative mutation, a marginal enterprise, into a fabulously marketable commodity. Meanwhile, the Broadway theater offers unwary tourists not plays but ridiculously expensive entertainment packages. The culture industry is booming, but creative activity takes place, as usual, around the edges, in small clubs, tiny theaters, and unheralded exhibitions.

New York remains what it has always been, at once exciting and unbearable – wonderful to live in and wonderful to get away from. New York artists have usually survived the intolerable pressures of the city by spending long periods in other places – in Paris, at Black Mountain, Bard, or Berkeley, in the Springs, Cape Cod, and Martha's Vineyard – generally in tandem with other refugee New Yorkers. Wherever they are, they're still trying to get

the nervous energy of the New York streets into their work – out of their lives but into their work.

Today, in Rockwell's words, "the city leads rather than commands." Since our culture is more decentralized, we can look back to the mid-century era of New York's unchallenged hegemony with a fondness untinged by fantasies of a golden age. As a recreation of the period, *New York: Culture Capital of the World*, despite occasional excesses of retrospective enthusiasm, is a model of its kind. It's hard to imagine an individual author doing justice to so many branches of the arts. The editor hasn't tried to lash his contributors to any single style or posture; like the arts they describe, the essays complement each other without fusing or dissolving.

The same can be said of the relation between text and pictures. The extended captions, written with care and attention, are laid out beautifully in the book's extra-wide margins. Often they read like capsule essays that boldly condense the essential viewpoint of the authors, even amplify it. Some of the illustrations are simply pendants to the text; others dazzlingly illuminate it. In the chapter on intellectuals, we turn from reading about Lionel Trilling and Norman Podhoretz to be assaulted by a lurid full-color reproduction of the original Ace cover paperback of *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*, by William Burroughs ("William Lee"). No words could so forcefully convey this antinomian mutation at the heart of the intellectual culture of the 1950s.

This is finally the story told by Leonard Wallock's well-conceived and beautifully designed book: not the saga of a tranquil era before the onset of our present troubles, but the story of how the culture of the forties, which helped make New York a world-class city, an imperial city, was gradually transformed into the culture of the sixties, which turbulently brought so much of our buried anger, hope, and discontent to the surface.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN

CULTURAL HIERARCHIES

HIGHBROW/LOWBROW: THE EMERGENCE OF CULTURAL HIERARCHY IN AMERICA. By **Lawrence W. Levine.** Harvard University Press. \$25.00.

Every critic, I suspect, is afflicted now and then by the itch to meddle with his subject's work. Not necessarily to improve what's on the

page, but rather to raise a baton and redirect the traffic of ideas – even when the ideas before him are good ones, necessary ones. He sees what he perceives to be roads not taken, grand opportunities lost. The impulse is undeniably grandiose. But it is also, in the last analysis, critical; therefore it is part of the job description.

Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* has affected me in just this way. Thoughtful, probing, packed through its rifts with provocative lore, the book is in many ways exemplary – it is even written with grace and care. And yet when I set it aside, I felt a most ungrateful twinge of disappointment. It was as if Levine had been building steadily toward what Prufrock called an “overwhelming question” – or connection – only to veer sharply to the side when the moment of truth arrived.

But first, about the book and its successes. As the subtitle indicates, *Highbrow/Lowbrow* traces the process whereby an open and pluralistic American culture – “culture” used here primarily in its artistic sense – became, over the course of the nineteenth century, stratified according to class and perceived value distinctions. Levine's lengthy opening chapter looks closely at changes in the performance and reception of Shakespeare's plays in 1800s America. Subsequent chapters demonstrate that the very same kinds of shifts were taking place with respect to opera, classical music, and art, accompanied by an increasingly rigid definition of “high” and “low” culture. The epilogue addresses itself, if glancingly, to debates being waged in our culture today, most notably the controversy surrounding Allen Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*.

Shakespeare was not always the exclusive property of self-flattering elites. We know, of course, that aristocrats and common folk stood elbow to elbow in the Globe Theater in Elizabeth's day. Levine convinces us that this was true as well in the cities and pioneer towns of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America. Audiences representing a full cross-section of the population jammed theaters of every description to see the plays performed. Shakespeare was, he asserts, more popular here for a time than in England. The documentation is as amusing as it is instructive:

In 1816 in Lexington, Kentucky, Noah Ludlow performed *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and *The Merchant of Venice* in a room on the second floor of an old brewery, next door to a saloon, before an audience seated on backless cushionless chairs. In the summer of 1833, Sol Smith's company performed in the dining room of a hotel in Tazewell, Alabama . . . His “heavy tragedian” Mr. Lyne attempted to recite the “Seven Ages of Man” from *As You Like It* while “persons were passing from one room to the other continually and the performer was obliged to move whenever anyone passed.”

These were boisterous audiences – heckling, applauding, calling for favorite scenes to be reprised – but they were not altogether ignorant. They knew at least enough to hoot at puns and one-liners and to hiss in anticipation of upcoming villainy. Certainly they were no less boisterous in responding to the other offerings on the bill: the plays were often sandwiched between song and dance routines, bawdy farces, and juggling acts. “[T]he play may have been the thing,” quips Levine, “but it was not the only thing.”

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, this democratic pluralism began to yield to the pressures of stratification. Shakespeare’s plays were gradually uprooted from the soil of competing popular entertainments; performances were cleansed of “low” effects and were more and more often given in separate theaters. And as the Bard came to be seen as one of “theirs,” working class audiences stuck with the burlesques and music halls. An aura of sanctity soon enveloped Shakespeare and his works.

Levine finds a number of reasons for this transformation. For one thing, massive immigration from non-English-speaking countries was changing the character of the working classes – fewer and fewer people were able to parse out the lines. Growing literacy, too, exerted a paradoxical impact; it “encroached upon the pervasive oral culture that had created in nineteenth-century America an audience more comfortable with listening than reading.” But suggestive as this is, one wonders what actual effect “letters” were having on the defecting constituency.

The real momentum for change was, as Levine points out, rooted in a more fundamental play of historical forces:

The process that had seen the noun “class” take on a series of hierarchical adjectives – “lower,” “middle,” “upper,” “working” – in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was operative for the noun “culture” a hundred years later. Just as the former development mirrored the economic changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution in England so the latter reflected the cultural consequences of modernization.

An increasingly powerful elite, in other words, began to look for ways to mark out its superiority – it claimed the Bard and defined the new terms for his appreciation.

The argument of *Highbrow/Lowbrow* is carried out mainly by way of carefully marshalled examples. And by the time Levine has discussed the parallel sacralization of the other arts, there is no gainsaying his underlying thesis: that culture is not an absolute, but a production of multiple social forces. The “classic” is a chameleon entity, adapting to the pressures of its lobbyists; it is an exclusionary barrier lowered against the masses by elites, a

tool of image-enhancement. Levine's documented assertions may give some pause to those presently defending the immutable sanctity of the "canon."

The presentation is not without its problems, however. Chief among these is Levine's refusal to draw what has to be a crucial distinction – that between "culture" and "entertainment." The images we get of working men and women stomping and catcalling through a performance of, for example, *Othello*, do not give us a sense of culture spreading its beams across lines of class. They suggest, rather, that the play is being brought down to the level of the farcing and banana juggling that follow it. We have to ask, pressing the relativist's case, whether culture might not inhere less in the artifact than in the uses it is put to. If *Othello* did not impinge meaningfully on the inwardness of its viewers – it may not have – then what did it do? But then, the question itself, assuming Arnoldian criteria of meaning and inwardness, takes an elitist vantage. Levine needs to bring these kinds of distinctions into the light.

We might also question the validity of building an argument about high and low culture primarily on the reception of Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare must be seen as something of a special case; he clearly wrote to offer something to viewers of every level of class and education. The broad appeal of his plays, in other words, says more about the plays than the tastes of the populace at large. We are left wondering whether the stratification of early nineteenth century American society was not a bit more pronounced than Levine allows.

A final frustration – to me the major one – is that Levine has appended to *Highbrow/Lowbrow* an epilogue which would draw some connections between his findings and our contemporary situation. But as he refuses to grapple with the major issues, the section is sans teeth. Levine tilts only timidly against the so-called "Bloom thesis," its Platonist assumption that eternal verities undergird all culture, and that these are embodied in a handful of sovereign masterpieces. If his findings lead him into the relativist's corner, then he ought to press his case more explicitly. Stepping back from the elitist-relativist debate, Levine writes:

If the debate is to be fruitful it needs to be rooted not merely in the web of our immediate aesthetic and social predilections but in the matrix of history, which can allow us to perceive more clearly what shapes culture has assumed in the American past, which may in turn allow us to understand better both the possibilities and the effects of the types of cultural boundaries we embrace.

Coming in the penultimate paragraph of his epilogue, this expression seems unnecessarily rhetorical and evasive.

But the real weakness of the concluding section lies in its avoidance of

the question of postmodernism. For what is postmodernism in our present-day culture but a concerted attack upon hierarchy, an attempted shattering of the high/low distinctions that have been applied to genres and cultural products? Andy Warhol, Robert Venturi, Philip Glass, Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Robert Wilson, and a throng of others have in the last decades worked to sabotage the very alignments that Levine has been tracking so carefully. To conclude such a stimulating excursus with thoughts about the present state of things while ignoring this latest current-shift is to deprive oneself – and one's readers – of resolution. Levine has a fine eye for cultural nuance and for the sweep of larger historical dynamics. He should look more searchingly at the present to see how his saga continues.

SVEN BIRKERTS

A CONVERSION

LOVESONG: BECOMING A JEW. By Julius Lester.
Henry Holt and Co. \$17.95.

After Sammy Davis, Jr., Julius Lester is probably the most famous black Jew in America. The reference to the song-and-dance man is not meant disrespectfully; Lester himself invites the connection ("I wish I knew another convert, a black one, but I don't know Sammy Davis"). A man of many parts, Lester was a blues singer (with two albums of original songs to his credit) and a New York City radio personality (host of "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution") before he joined the University of Massachusetts faculty in 1971. He has since become the only professor to win all three of that school's teaching awards. In addition to publishing collections of poetry and black folktales, Lester files the occasional column of polemic journalism; an article in *The New Republic* criticized Jesse Jackson's "messianism" and the "almost mass hysteria surrounding the Jackson campaign" in 1988. An inveterate controversialist, Lester writes with a conviction of his own singularity and, more important, a sure-fire instinct for the jugular. Yet Lester's texts and his teachings are somehow of less moment than the spectacle of the self he has fashioned to accommodate the contradictions in his nature. He is, I imagine, unique in having contrived a way to internalize the conflict between blacks and Jews by being able to experience the rival claims of both sides. It's almost as if his career as a controversialist were either an allegory or a parable of this condition.

Lester chronicles his spiritual autobiography in the sometimes lyrical and sometimes purple prose of *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew*. He was, he reminds us, scarcely a likely candidate for conversion: he made his name initially as a SNCC radical in the decade of black rage. The very title of his 1968 book – *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama!* – snaps you back to the militant idioms of that era. But from the start Lester was an extremist of the spirit, willing to reverse himself and unwilling to settle for half measures. When he renounced radical politics in the early 1970s, it was in favor of its opposite: the solitary quest for religious truth. In Thomas Merton's Abbey of Gethsemani he meditated on monasticism. He contemplated the Great Spirit of the Sioux at Wounded Knee. At last a hesitant early fascination with Judaism took hold and turned into an enduring obsession. Lester – the son of a Methodist minister – made it official in 1983. A year later he had himself circumcised to seal his covenant with the God of Abraham.

When *Lovesong* was published in 1988, the reviews, though favorable, were modest: the book had pretty much faded from sight when suddenly word got out about the latest in a long line of Lester-centered furors. Depending on whom you chose to believe, Lester had either been ousted or was “transferred at his own request” out of U-Mass's Afro-American program and into its Judaic Studies department. It was, at least nominally, a case involving academic freedom: Lester charged that his black colleagues had ostracized him because of things he had written in *Lovesong*. “The democratic spirit is endangered in black America,” he told a reporter, generalizing from his own experience and adding a somber admonition: “If there isn't space for diversity, then one is confronting a kind of moral fascism.” Such charges as these were bound to get, and did get, a good deal of press coverage, not only because of Lester's reputation as a pugnacious free-thinker but because the U-Mass Amherst campus has a troubling recent history of racial tension.*

Lester says many impolitic things in *Lovesong*. What specifically enraged his erstwhile colleagues to the point of their taking collective action was his account of an allegedly anti-Semitic lecture given by the late James Baldwin at U-Mass in 1984. According to *Lovesong*, Baldwin had not merely castigated the press for harping on candidate Jesse Jackson's description of New York as “Hymietown”; in Lester's view, Baldwin's words in class that day had in effect “given black students permission to stand up and mouth every anti-Semitic cliché they knew.” Incensed by what they considered to be Lester's defamation of Baldwin's character, members of U-Mass's Black Studies Department promptly went into an emergency session. At that February meeting it was agreed that Afro-American chairman Chester

* I am indebted to Sue Hutchison for research and reporting that went into this review.

Davis would write a letter to the dean, reporting that Lester's "relocation" to a different academic department would "be welcomed by all parties." To counter Lester's version of the 1984 incident, the department also published a forty-page pamphlet containing a transcript of Baldwin's lecture with an unsigned epilogue dubbing Lester an "anti-Negro Negro." The group action inadvertently lent support to a charge Lester makes often in *Lovesong*: that (in his metaphor) the scarlet letter "A" in academic society refers not to adultery but to apostasy.

What really happened when Baldwin spoke that February day in 1984? A review of the transcript shows that the "lecture" was really an extended question-and-answer session. The only formal presentation was an ad hoc opening statement in which Baldwin introduced the subject of Jews and blacks. "Unconsciously a black person tends to expect more from a Jewish person than he expects from anybody else," Baldwin said. "And because the American Jew in this country is essentially a white man, this expectation is always defeated with a resulting accumulation of bitterness, because the American Jew is acting on the minor inheritance [i.e. America] and rejecting the major one [Judaism]." A derogatory reference to neo-conservatives ("a polite word for a peculiarly vindictive form of American neo-fascism") seemed in this context needlessly pointed. And Baldwin was unpleasantly flip in characterizing the media's handling of Jackson's "Hymietown" epithet. "I smell a rat somewhere," said Baldwin. "It doesn't seem entirely – can we use the word? – *kosher*."

Baldwin's statement was plainly worrisome, even offensive. Whether Lester was justified in labeling it "a diatribe" is debatable. But surely what is strangest about the affair is the Afro-American Department's assumption that the pamphlet's publication would automatically vindicate Baldwin and discredit Lester. In response to one student questioner, Baldwin invoked the image of Jewish "bosses" who use their religion as a sort of protective cloak. Then, he said, if somebody "points out that the black boys and the Puerto Rican boys pushing trucks in the garment center are pushing those trucks for American industry and their bosses are Jews, but the fact that their bosses are Jews is absolutely unimportant, what is important is that they are pushing those trucks, what is crucial, what is terrible about it, is that when you turn, you know, pushing the trucks, and accuse your boss of doing what you know he's doing, and he says I can't be doing that because I'm a Jew, then you begin to hate him and that's when you're called an anti-Semite." Another student's question elicited Baldwin's comment that "part of the hazard, actually, morally, historically, of the Jewish . . . of being a Jew is finding yourself doing the Christian's dirty work." It is true that Baldwin intended nuances that his listeners may not have grasped but it is also true that anti-Semitism sometimes takes the form of de-mystifying anti-Semitism. In any case, it is hard to imagine being a Jew in that audience and quarreling with Lester's

appraisal: Baldwin, he wrote in *Lovesong*, “is not an anti-Semite, but his remarks in class were anti-Semitic, and he does not realize it.”

Like the trail of a comet, the tail of the controversy exceeded its body in significance. The affair didn’t so much hinge on what Baldwin said, meant, or provoked in 1984 but on how people behaved in 1988. Lester’s view was simple: he felt he had “caught hell” for criticizing Jesse Jackson in 1984 and now again for depicting Baldwin “in his frail humanness rather than as an icon before whom candles are to be lighted.” Afro-American Department members countered by pointing to the gravity of Lester’s offense in their eyes. He was in the audience on February 28, 1984; why didn’t he speak up then? “Julius is saying that we criticized him for disagreeing with us about Baldwin,” Professor John Bracey told a reporter. “We’re saying that he *lied* about Baldwin.” A statement signed by fifteen department members asserted that Baldwin’s talk had “sparked a great deal of lively, rational, and civil interchange” and not, as Lester wrote in *Lovesong*, “hurt and anger” among the Jewish students. Lester, said Professor Ernest Allen, “throws gasoline on inflammatory situations and is surprised when they blow up.”

U-Mass Chancellor Joseph Duffey, a cautious man, initiated an inquiry to see whether a full-scale investigation was warranted. It was not clear that Lester’s academic freedom was technically violated, and Duffey was right to reserve judgement. But he did object strongly to the idea of a departmental meeting convened to examine a professor’s views. Duffey called the February meeting an “inquisition.” When a department member protested the use of this word, the chancellor shot back: “Frankly, I am surprised that you do not see the dangerous, even ominous, threat that such an action by an academic department can pose to the spirit and reality of a university community in terms of freedom of thought and expression.”

This isn’t the first time Lester has tested the limits of toleration by exercising his freedom of thought. What is most remarkable about his conversion to Judaism is that the noisiest brouhaha of his career – at least until the current flap – centered on charges that Lester promoted the black anti-Semitism that he now so volubly deplores. It happened during the winter of 1968-69, in the aftermath of a teacher’s strike that seemed to pit blacks against Jews in New York City. Just when relations between the two minorities had reached boiling point, Lester broadcast a teenage black girl’s anti-Semitic poem on his radio program – and played a tape of it for the next two weeks. The poem began: “Hey, Jew boy, with that yarmulke on your head/ You pale-faced Jew boy – I wish you were dead.” Looking back, Lester now says – astonishingly – that at the time he thought the poem “would facilitate contact between Jews and blacks.” But he knew he had given offense and somehow started identifying himself with the people he offended.

By 1979 Lester had vaulted to the other side of the firing line. When

Andrew Young resigned under pressure as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Lester excoriated “Black leadership” for treating “Jews as scape-goats” in that affair. “Blacks, too, can be Germans,” he wrote in a *Village Voice* article that was widely circulated and reprinted as a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times*. That same year Lester developed a course in the comparative suffering of blacks and Jews in history. The subject continues to fascinate him: “Jews came to America to escape persecution and blacks came to America and found persecution,” he muses. As Lester sees it, his growing involvement with Judaism led to his ostracism. Back in 1979, one black colleague is said to have accosted him in the corridor with an unconscious echo of the schoolgirl’s radio poem: “I’m sick and tired of hearing about the Holocaust!”

In the tradition of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, Lester authenticates the earnestness of *Lovesong* by acknowledging past errors. He and fellow sixties revolutionaries were guilty, he writes, of “an evil arrogance”; he blames himself for heeding “the Siren call of history” at the expense of his own spiritual well-being. Lester writes with the conviction and passion that readers associate with truthfulness, though experts in the confessional mode remind us that the appearance of candor may amount to just another clever rhetorical strategy or even a confidence act. The author’s Afro-American critics insist that he’s a self-serving polemicist and media manipulator. Flamboyant he clearly is. He sports a cowboy hat on weekdays; the dust jacket of *Lovesong* shows him in his Sabbath best, wearing yarmulke and prayer shawl. The history of Lester’s enthusiasms reveals them to be short-lived, and there’s no guarantee that he won’t turn again. “He’s gone,” in U-Mass Professor John Bracey’s words, “on a spiritual merry-go-round.”

But the important question, personalities aside, is not whether justice is being served at U-Mass. The important question is whether there is, as Lester charges, party-line conformism at work within the black community in general and among Afro-American professors in particular. Is that line as adversarial toward Jews as Lester claims, and if so, what can be done at this late date to change things? Do the demands of black solidarity compromise the spirit of disinterested critical inquiry, and if so, does this help make Harold Bloom’s case that “the ideologies of resentment” are gaining sway in the academy? However anomalous a character Lester is, the fact that his case raises such questions lends it an indisputable significance at a time when the virtues of tolerance and civil dissent seem less often honored in the observance than in the breach.

DAVID LEHMAN

THE ART OF PAINTING

PAINTING AS AN ART. By Richard Wollheim.

Princeton University Press. \$45.00.

By profession Richard Wollheim is a philosopher, best-known as the author of a concise, comprehensive treatise on aesthetics, *Art and Its Objects*. Aesthetics, however, is not the only path Wollheim has pursued toward understanding art. Nor is the straightforward analysis of the Anglo-American philosophers his only manner of writing, despite his plain language and penchant to number sections in the style of followers of Wittgenstein. The reader of Wollheim's latest book, *Painting as an Art*, will detect signs of the author's complex intellectual past – much of his writing departs from philosophical rigor to engage in emotional introspection and poetic speculation.

Wollheim has studied art, the mind, and human emotions through a variety of writing modes, which together exhibit a network of recurring themes and associations. His publications include a psychological novel, *A Family Romance*, whose title alludes to Freud, on whom Wollheim completed an introductory text. He also wrote *F.H. Bradley*, a monograph on the Oxford metaphysician who happened to have influenced Adrian Stokes, Wollheim's mentor in the field of art criticism. Stokes underwent analysis with Melanie Klein, and his writing (as well as Wollheim's) uses some of her psychological constructs. These specific interconnections – with Bradley representing philosophy; Stokes, criticism; and Klein, psychoanalysis – are coincidental, yet their configuration seems to define Wollheim's general enterprise. Indeed, in his epilogue to *F.H. Bradley*, he speculated briefly about what psychological motivation might have produced the philosopher's metaphysics, attempting “to relate an intellectual work to the elementary and emotional movements of the psyche.” Thus, Wollheim, early in his career, was explaining the particularities of a philosophy in terms of the satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs, much as a critic might conceive of the causes, purposes, and meanings of a work of art. It was an instance of the crossing of disciplinary boundaries that would so often characterize his later work – the intermingling of discourses of philosophy, psychoanalysis, criticism, and art (both literary and pictorial).

We find this mix again in *Painting as an Art* – part aesthetics, part psychoanalysis, part art criticism. Two introductory chapters present a theory of “what the artist does” and “what the spectator sees.” The reader recognizes Wollheim here in his role as aesthetician, offering some basic principles in preparation for the interpretation of individual works. At the core of his theory are notions of “seeing-in,” “twofoldness,” and “expressive

perception.” These terms refer to the spectator’s capacity to perceive an image or to experience an emotional effect as a result of viewing a marked surface, whether painting, photograph, or scratched and spotted wall. Such viewing involves a double recognition (hence, its “twofoldness”): one sees both the material surface itself and some figure or thing that seems to inhabit the “space” of that surface; Wollheim’s illustration is a photograph of a stained wall in which the figure of a boy can be discerned.

Awareness of the natural phenomenon of seeing-in allows one to set about to make what (by Wollheim’s definition) is properly called a “representation,” a surface that an artist marks with the specific intention “that a spectator should see something in it.” Such representations are not to be confused with symbols, maps, or other images that fail to call attention to or “thematize” their own surfaces. Symbols of the more general type, such as words, require that the interpreter have a previous knowledge of conventions available to be applied to any statement in the relevant language. Paintings differ in their specificity and immediacy of access. Most of the knowledge the spectator requires can be found through the viewing process itself. Ideally, the spectator’s “careful, sensitive, and generally informed scrutiny of the painting will extract from it the very information that is needed to understand it. It is a kind of bootstrap operation.” You look long and hard and, with the momentum provided by Western culture’s investment in the painting tradition itself, you pull up the “correct” meaning.

There is a deeply conservative aspect to this mode of seeing and method of interpretation, a conservatism Wollheim is not afraid to acknowledge. He situates himself as far as possible from currently fashionable concerns for intertextuality and the play of the language of representation. He presumes that an authoritative, “correct” viewing and meaning is there to be experienced beyond ambiguity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy. Wollheim denies that specific instances of artistic expression depend on the preexistence of some reiterative expressive type (in other words, he is no poststructuralist). Works of art, he believes, are accessible to the evidence of the eye and can communicate directly because they touch upon a “common human nature” (and by this concept, incidentally, he links his art criticism to the concerns of socialism).

Accordingly, Wollheim returns to the model of visual inspection provided by the tradition of connoisseurship, a method that privileges the artist as a kind of expressive genius as well as identifying the qualified interpreter with that same privilege. All paintings are seen as historical equals, available to a spectator who sits outside history in the realm of “common human nature.” Wollheim shifts back and forth between discussions of Renaissance and modern masters without regard to their historicity or his own as viewer. The object of criticism, the meaning or content of a work, is simply what the artist consciously intended (or, in some cases, was unconsciously moved to do); and

such meaning must, by definition, be accessible to intelligent, perceptive human viewers. Neither semiotics nor hermeneutics finds a place in such a practice of interpretation, nor does the history of techniques and genres, nor any study of the sociology or ideology of viewing.

Following the introductory material are four chapters that develop interpretive themes. In the first of these, Wollheim posits an “internal” spectator as a feature of certain compositions, particularly works by Manet. The external spectator (the actual viewer) imagines this internal spectator who enters the space of the picture and either succeeds or fails to make direct contact with whatever is represented there. Often when Manet depicts human figures he renders them so mysteriously evasive that the internal spectator can be only frustrated in his efforts to engage them. An example is *Mlle V. in the Costume of an Espada*. Wollheim argues that the cluttered background of this picture – a set of images surrounding the central woman, seeming to make only loose thematic and perspectival connection with her – “peels back [and] opens up an undefined or irrational volume of space in which a perambulating internal spectator might insert himself.” He goes on to associate this effect with that produced by another type of background common to Manet’s pictures, the vague and undifferentiated ground to be seen in a number of portraits. Within a few short paragraphs Wollheim moves from the odd observation that a background “peels back,” to the speculative assertion that Manet used both cluttered grounds and undifferentiated ones with the express purpose of establishing an internal spectator. This conclusion is consistent with Wollheim’s belief that (1) concerted looking tells you what a picture is about; (2) a picture is about what an artist intended it to be about. If you look hard and see it, Manet must have meant it. Once Wollheim gets onto this interpretive track, the train moves like a bullet toward its destination – everything Manet does is done for the sake of that internal spectator.

I would be more inclined to travel along if there were at least one or two stops. The cluttered background of *Mlle V.*, as well as the figure itself, plays upon pictorial conventions for allegorical representation. This has been noted by recent scholars and was alluded to by Manet’s contemporaries. There is no need to posit an internal spectator to make some sense of this picture. Wollheim has substituted a difficult and implausible explanation for an easier one that has some historical foundation. The only previous interpretation of the odd compositional features of *Mlle V.* that he acknowledges is one no one is now likely to accept – that Manet was “inept” at composition. Wollheim’s ignorance of the more sophisticated critical work on Manet seems willful.

Despite the systematic organization of its introductory chapters, the remainder of *Painting as an Art* has little cumulative effect. Once presented, the theme of the “internal” spectator makes only the briefest reappearances. One chapter deals with Ingres’s distorted figures and spaces, leading to an

interpretation of what the act of painting meant to this artist, who (Wollheim speculates) wished to bring about “the humanization of the father.” Another chapter offers an account of how certain paintings constitute metaphors of the body as a container (a Kleinian notion). Wollheim seems to entertain two competing senses of containment, but does not recognize them as such: first, a body or vessel can be a space in which an unspecified number of objects might, as it were, float around; second, a body (like the human body) can be “full” and of fixed mass and density. The first type of container corresponds to some of the Renaissance pictures Wollheim discusses, and the second to works by de Kooning.

Although the chapters devoted to interpretation are organized around themes and critical concepts (such as pictorial metaphor), they read very much like a first-person narrative, an account, as the author puts it at one point, of “what I see, and feel, and think.” The reader may even sense here the working of imaginative, projective fantasies usually associated with the writing of an autobiographical novel; *Painting as an Art* represents the culmination of a lifetime of fascinated musings over the meanings of a number of paintings that were objects of the author’s own psychological investment from an early age, especially works by Poussin. In his end-notes Wollheim refers some of the more challenging of his musings to Freud and Melanie Klein, yet certain of his associations can seem only more artistic than critical, that is to say, they are creative, arbitrary, and personal. For instance, he links Poussin’s motif of snake and water to the weapons of “infantile sadism . . . biting gums or teeth, and burning urine.” But the water in question, seen in Poussin’s *Winter*, suggests cold much more than “burning.” The reader is offered an interpretation that provokes but hardly convinces; it comes from a writer who claims that direct inspection of a picture will yield the artist’s intentions, therefore the “meaning” of the work. There is little for the reader to do but find the interpretation intuitively agreeable or disagreeable. What Wollheim offers, finally, is observation without theory, however much it has been prefaced by theory. And his ambitious book ends up being entertaining but hardly instructive.

RICHARD SHIFF

LETTERS

To the Editor:

Edith Kurzweil is obviously right when she argues that Freud transformed the way in which we understand the human mind (*PR* 1, 1990). But like others in the dwindling band of psychoanalytic partisans, she confuses influence with therapeutic efficacy and scientific validity. If, as she claims, there are thousands of studies which confirm Freud's theories, there are tens of thousands that do not. Nor is there any evidence, Dr. Kurzweil's contemptuous dismissal of "quick-fix therapies" notwithstanding, that psychoanalysis helps people deal with emotional distress more effectively than its less costly rivals.

That psychoanalysis has made substantial inroads into the humanities and the social sciences is not necessarily a cause for celebration. If the doctors' assault on Clio is any guide, the effects of psychoanalysis on scholarship will prove more baleful than its once-powerful influence on the practice of psychotherapy.

John Orens
Fredericksburg, Virginia

implied that "more is better." I did assume, however, that Mr. Oren, along with the rest of our readers, realizes that the psychoanalytic technique, and its aims of changing unconscious mechanisms, not only takes longer but is thought to have more lasting effects. Neither the "thousands of studies which confirm Freud's theories," nor the "tens of thousands" Mr. Orens claims refute them, prove or disprove my argument – that every country creates its own Freud.

Edith Kurzweil replies:

Had Mr. Orens followed the gist of my essay, he would have realized that I emphasized the location of psychoanalytic thought in various countries rather than "therapeutic efficacy and scientific validity." Nor did I question the fact that "quick-fix therapies" may help people, although I

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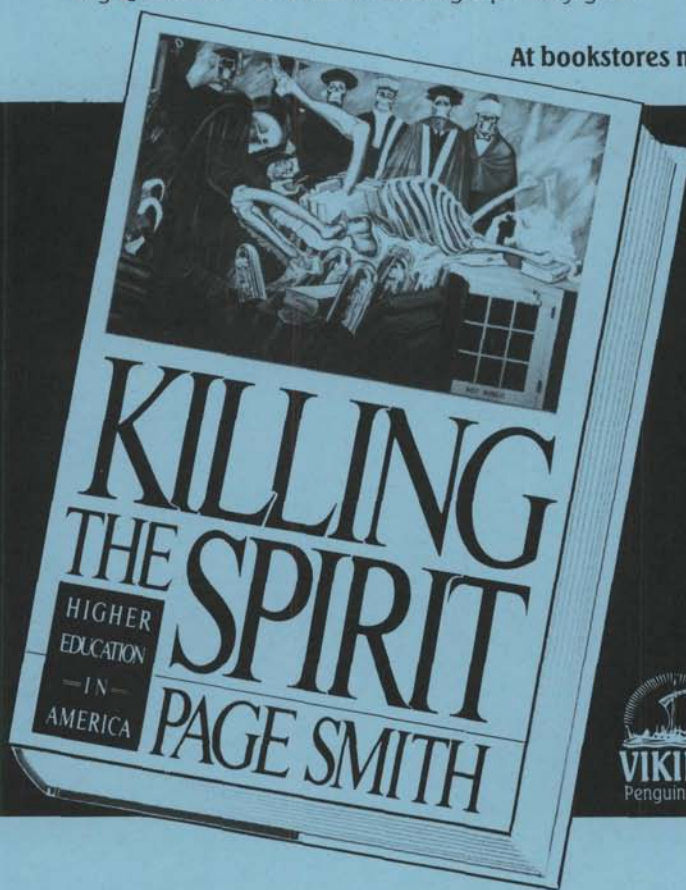
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